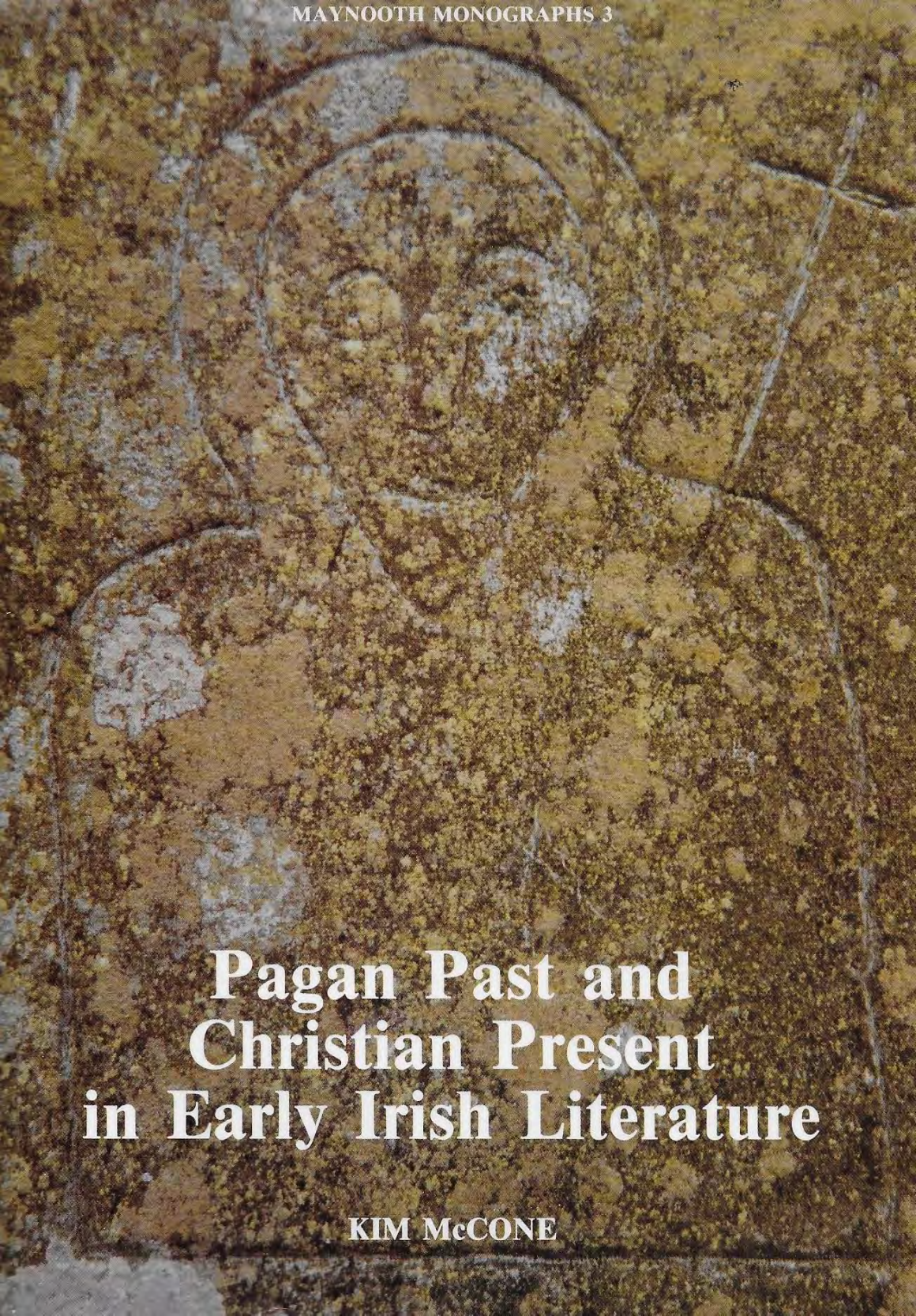
MAYNOOTH MONOGRAPHS 3



Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature

KIM McCONE

Front cover from a photograph of an early Christian stone in the graveyard of Cillín Cormaic, Co. Kildare, kindly supplied by Susan Brown, Falmouth, Nova Scotia.

PAGAN PAST AND CHRISTIAN PRESENT IN EARLY IRISH LITERATURE

MAYNOOTH MONOGRAPHS 3

Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature

by
Kim McCone

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER ONE, Medieval scholars and modern nativists: 1

1. The literary corpus and its monastic transmission 1
2. The Indo-European hypothesis 2
3. Orality and the written text 3
4. Paganism and monastic authors 6
5. Medieval Ireland's alleged social archaism 8
6. International scholarship in a cultural backwater? 10
7. The peripheries: Ireland and India 13
8. Clerical influence and pagan tradition 17
9. The druidic legacy and the 'Celtic twilight' 19
10. Monastic scholars, poets, jurists and historians 22
11. Disciplinary interdependence and the monastic core curriculum 24
12. *Bard, fili* and *núalitrid* 27

CHAPTER TWO, Literary genre and narrative technique: 29

1. The biblical dimension 29
2. Some basic biblical parallels 30
3. Narrative possibilities of biblical borrowing 32
4. Latin, the vernacular and the Irish language's origin myth 35
5. Mixtures of prose and verse 37
6. The rise of rhymed syllabic metre 38
7. The nature of *roscad* or *retoiric* 41
8. Some 'psalmodic' features of *retoiric* 44
9. Narrative functions of medieval and biblical etymology 46
10. "There was a wondrous king . . ." and similar openings 48
11. Aspects of narrative prose style 49
12. Instructive recent developments in Norse saga studies 52

CHAPTER THREE, 'Pagan' myth and Christian 'history': 54

1. Mythology vs. pseudohistory 54
2. From myth to allegory 55
3. From solar to functionalist mythology 57
4. Formalist and structuralist approaches 58
5. Oral and literary myth 62
6. Myth, history and *senchus* 65
7. The Bible and the Gaels' wanderings 66
8. The invasions of Ireland and biblical analogues 69
9. Before and after Patrick 71
10. Pre-Patrician Irish believers; Cormac, Morann and Conchobar 72
11. Fintan mac Bóchra and the divine revelation of *senchus* 75
12. *Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó* as moral satire 77
13. Christian allegory and *Echtrae Chonlai* 79

CHAPTER FOUR, The law and the prophets: 84

1. The question of pagan origins 84
2. The *áes dáno* as a levitical caste 86
3. Erc the judge, Dubthach the poet and St. Patrick in Muirchú's Life .. 89
4. The laws of nature, the letter, the prophets and Christ 92
5. Lóegaire, Dubthach, Patrick and the perfection of Irish law: a biblical construct 96
6. King, poet and bishop as promulgators of the *Senchus Már* 99
7. Caí, Cormac and pre-Patrician Ireland's 'Mosaic' code 100
8. Old Testament influence upon early Christian Irish legal rules 102
9. Matching the past with the present 104

CHAPTER FIVE, Kingship and society: 107

1. Preliminaries 107
2. Pagan Celtic sacral kingship 107
3. The Celtic and Indo-European *hieros gamos*: Nala and Damayantī, Pwyll and Rhiannon, Odysseus and Penelope 109
4. The IE king's integration of three basic social functions: some mythical and ritual reflexes 117
5. Likely pagan IE survivals in Irish regnal ideology 120
6. The early Irish king's personal attributes - physical, social and moral 121
7. *Enech* "face" and *fír flaithemon* "ruler's truth" 124
8. The early Irish king as the embodiment of society and its divisions ... 124
9. The king as mirror of early Ireland's primary social classes and their values 127
10. The sovereignty's matching threefold attributes - abstract and personal 128
11. Narrative expressions of the fate of kings and would-be kings 131
12. New sovereignty for old 132
13. *Geisi* or 'taboos' 136
14. Basic conclusions 137

CHAPTER SIX, Sovereignty and the Church: 138

1. Christian monks as devotees of pagan sovereignty? 138
2. Clerical manipulation of regnal ideology, and early Irish kingship by God's grace 139
3. The Church and the blessings of a righteous ruler 143
4. *Comúaim n-ecalsa fri túaith* "the sewing together of Church with State" in *Aided Díarmata* and *Aided Muirchertaig* 145
5. Women of sovereignty and Christian cosmology: human, angelic or demonic? 148
6. Sovereignty's sanctification: Eithne in *Altram Tige dá Medar* and Tírechán 149
7. *Echtrae Nerai* and the destruction of the sovereignty's pagan source .. 151
8. *Echta Airt* and the good or evil aspects of the pre-Patrician sovereignty 152
9. Some biblical parallels 153
10. The angelic sovereignty as an allegorical and typological prefiguration of the Church 155
11. Old Testament models for pre-Christian kingly behaviour 158

CHAPTER SEVEN, Fire and the arts: 161

1. Social tripartition, the *áes dáno* and fire 161
2. Daig, Brigit and the threefold arts of healing, craftsmanship and learning 161
3. Brig/Brigit and the correlation of the threefold arts with tripartite society 162
4. Daig, Brigit and fire 164
5. Saints Brigit and Áed, Daig and Lasar 165
6. Fire and the cooking of metals, medicaments and knowledge 166
7. Fire as a socialising agent: the hospitaller as boiler of food 169
8. Destructive fire and desocialization: the warrior's ardour and the caustic effects of dishonour 171
9. The king as cooked, eater and cook 173
10. Fire in the Bible and early Irish Christian fire symbolism 174

CHAPTER EIGHT, Heroes and saints: 179

1. Saga, saint's Life and continental hagiography 179
2. The heroic biography as exemplified by the early careers of Níall Noígíallach and St. Brigit 181
3. The taxonomic approach to heroic biography 184
4. Heroic liminality: Moses, St. Brigit, Asdiwal and Lot 185
5. Liminal or boundary situations at the conception and birth of some early Irish heroes and saints 189
6. Cormac, St. Ailbe and the suckling she-wolf in the wilderness; Mess Búachalla and incest 190
7. Liminality as a means of mediating key structural oppositions 193
8. Biblical models for some narrative attributes of St. Patrick and Níall Noígíallach 195
9. Heroes in limbo on the threshold of faith: Cú Chulainn, Conchobar and Christ 197
10. Heroic encounters with saints or poets to mediate between the pagan and Christian eras: *Síaburcharpat Con Culainn*, the "revelation" of the *Táin* and the Church's control over access to pre-Patrician *senchus* 199

CHAPTER NINE, Druids and outlaws: 203

1. Some preliminaries on early Irish fosterage 203
2. The *fer midboth*, the *óenchiniud* and the *fían* 203
3. *Díberg* "brigandage" and the early Irish *fían* as a hunter-warrior society ('Männerbund') of unmarried and propertiless young aristocrats; *brandub* in the *Codex Sancti Pauli* charm and other fraternal contests to determine inheritance of property 205
4. The *fían* as a typical Männerbund: age-grading in 'primitive' societies and medieval French knights errant 209
5. Senior *fían*-members as law enforcers 211
6. Werewolf aspects of Irish, Germanic and other Indo-European Männerbunds 213
7. The suckling she-wolf revisited: *Genemuin Chormaic*, Romulus and Remus, Cyrus of Persia, the birth of Zeus, and the Norse Volsungs .. 214

8. Clerical disapproval of the *fían*, and a modern African parallel 218
9. The druid (*druí*), satirist (*cáinte*) and other pagan excommunicates associated with the *fían* in early Christian Ireland 220
10. Respectable 'free' (*sóer-baird*) and disreputable 'base' bards (*dóer-baird*), including the *cáinte* etc 224
11. The pagan fringes of early Christian Irish society, and polarizations within the *áes dáno* 226
12. The *fili*'s origins: metamorphosed druid, renamed seer (*fáith*) or upgraded bard? 227
13. The Irish *druí* and the biblical *magus*. 229
14. Biblical typology and literary depictions of the pre-Patrician druid ... 229

CHAPTER TEN, Politics and propaganda: 233

1. The vast early Irish genealogical corpus 233
2. Anthropological research into the political functions of genealogy and its relevance to the Irish situation 235
3. Some broad outlines of the medieval Irish genealogical scheme and their significance 237
4. Leth Cuinn, Leth Moga and the kingship of Ireland 241
5. Genealogy and the interrelation of lay and ecclesiastical dynasties 243
6. Political propaganda and the narrative code: some hagiographical examples 244
7. Narrative flesh on genealogical bones 248
8. Synchronisms between appropriate genealogical nodes, and sibling rivalry as an expression of political enmity 249
9. The reinforcement of genealogical synchronisms by parallel narratives 252

EPILOGUE 256

BIBLIOGRAPHY 258

INDEX 269

PROLOGUE

An integrated approach to medieval Ireland's vast extant literature has long been hampered by a tendency to partition it into secular and ecclesiastical genres, the former written mostly in Old or Middle Irish and the latter in Latin or the vernacular. Medievalists dealing with obviously clerical sources, especially the Hiberno-Latin ones most readily accessible to them, have increasingly come to recognise the wide and up-to-date reading, erudite sophistication, and reasonably typical medieval western outlook, scriptural and patristic orientation behind them. By contrast, many Old and Middle Irish scholars have been prone to regard 'secular' or 'native' vernacular sources as barely adulterated repositories of ancient oral traditions and pagan beliefs compiled by remarkably complaisant antiquarian clerics and jurists in a backward and only superficially christianised Ireland.

Since all extant early Irish literature was undoubtedly produced in monasteries, this glaring apparent discrepancy in monkish attitudes has become an increasing source of disquiet for some scholars both in the field and outside. From the 1950s onwards the late James Carney, following in Rudolf Thurneysen's footsteps, insisted in the face of prevalent 'nativist' orthodoxy that most extant early Irish sagas bore a clear and deep monastic imprint, whatever their remote origins in pagan oral tradition. In the 1970s Donnchadh Ó Corráin began to assemble evidence that early medieval Ireland, far from being politically fragmented and hidebound by blind adherence to tradition, had developed a dynamic political system dominated by ambitious overkings whose monastic propagandists and genealogists were ruthless reshapers of the past in the interests of the present. Meanwhile Tomás Ó Cathasaigh and others have produced studies of early Irish sagas showing them to be deliberate literary compositions primarily geared to contemporary concerns rather than mere antiquarian assemblages, however archaic or traditional the elements so manipulated. Finally, the most jealously guarded of all traditionalist bastions, the early Irish secular law tracts, has fallen of late to the assaults of Donnchadh Ó Corráin and Liam Breatnach, who have pointed to pervasive scriptural, patristic and canonistic influence upon them and made an incontrovertible case for monastic authorship.

The net effect of these impulses has been to propel early Christian Ireland from an allegedly abnormal and stagnant 'Celtic fringe' into the mainstream of an early medieval European civilization that owes no small debt to her formative influence. Taken together, they amount to a revolution in scholarly attitudes that greatly increases the relevance of early medieval Irish culture to that of Western Europe as a whole without discounting its peculiarities.

Since these important new developments have almost inevitably accumulated piecemeal in learned articles on particular topics, it seems desirable to attempt to combine them and some further aspects into a provisional synthesis and overview. That, of course, is the main aim of the present volume, which argues that, for all its diversity, early Irish literature as a whole is rooted in a coherent, far-reaching and flexible construct or *senchus* adapted, synthesised and modified by monastic men of letters from the Bible and other Latin writings in conjunction with vernacular traditions both oral and increasingly, as time went on, written. Indeed, the level of scholarship, intellectual analysis and imagination they brought to bear upon this gargantuan undertaking bears striking testimony to the dynamism, creativity,

erudition and cohesion of the monastically based civilization that blossomed in Ireland from the sixth-century A.D. onwards and helped to lead Britain and Europe out of the Dark Ages.

This book owes a great deal not only to the published researches of the friends and colleagues mentioned above but also to suggestions made by them and others, including Joseph Nagy and Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, in discussions concerning general issues and points of detail. I am particularly grateful to my wife, Katharine Simms, for her unflagging interest, helpful comments and assistance in the correction of proofs and compilation of an index. Without these and other contributions this book would not have been written, but responsibility for the opinions expressed in it and for remaining errors great and small is, of course, mine alone.

KIM McCONE
St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.
September, 1989.

To my parents

CHAPTER ONE

Medieval scholars and modern nativists

1. In addition to a very substantial Latin literature early Christian Ireland boasts by far the most extensive and diverse vernacular literature in medieval Europe. The period from the fifth to the twelfth century A.D. abounds in Latin, Old or Middle Irish and bilingual texts in prose, poetry or a mixture of both covering a wide range of genres such as liturgy, homiletics, biblical exegesis and paraphrase, hymnody and eulogy, hagiography, Latin and Irish grammar, etymology, onomastics, topography, annals, genealogy, legal tracts concerning the Church and lay society, gnomic literature, prophecy, vision and voyage narratives, saga and history.

The whole of this literature was undoubtedly produced either in monasteries or by people who had received an essentially monastic education. In many cases this is evident from the genre itself or from the use of Latin in whole or part of a given text. Even in works composed almost entirely in medieval Irish casual snatches of Latin or the sudden switch to a more substantial passage in the language of the Western Church often betray a clerical author writing for readers likewise familiar with Latin as a result of a monastic training. Moreover, all of the comparatively few manuscripts that have come down to us from the pre-Norman period are quite clearly of monastic provenance, including those three great twelfth-century repositories of saga, genealogical and ecclesiastical material in Irish *Lebor na hUidre*, Rawlinson B 502 and the Book of Leinster. The recorded titles of lost manuscripts known to have contained saga material in Irish, e.g. *Cín/Lebor Dromma Snechta* or 'The Book of Drumsnat' (a monastery in Monaghan, cf. Thurneysen, 1921, 15-8) and *Lebor Buide Sláne* or 'The Yellow Book of Slane' (a major monastery in Meath, cf. Dillon, 1953, 12), are equally significant in this respect, and early Christian Ireland would in any case have been quite abnormal by medieval western European standards if literacy in Latin or the vernacular had existed there on any scale outside the sphere of her monasteries and their alumni.

Formidable linguistic difficulties associated with the vast corpus of Old and Middle Irish texts, most of them preserved in manuscripts written in or after the fourteenth century, have tended to restrict the number of scholars working upon this material since the serious revival of interest around the middle of the nineteenth-century. Because the pioneers of the new discipline rightly concentrated their efforts upon improving the linguistic analysis indispensable for a proper understanding of

the material and upon making texts, translations and synopses available to a wider scholarly audience, broader questions of interpretation were, by and large, postponed until a later and fairly recent stage. Hence the paradox that Europe's most abundantly documented early medieval culture, particularly where vernacular sources are concerned, remains among the least thoroughly researched. Rich seams of information have yet to be tapped, and these can be expected to enhance our appreciation of early medieval European literature and civilization as a whole.

2. For the last three or four decades the most influential and fashionable approach to the evaluation of early Irish literature has, at least until quite recently, been the one aptly dubbed 'nativist' by its major and for a long time largely isolated critic, James Carney (1955, 276). Scholars such as Myles Dillon, D.A. Binchy, Kenneth Jackson, Proinsias Mac Cana and Seán Ó Coileáin have in various different ways discussed medieval Irish society, law and letters from a broadly common standpoint stressing the conservatism of the 'tradition', its fundamentally oral transmission and continuity with a pagan past rooted in Celtic and Indo-European antiquity. While the role of Christianity and literacy in this process could hardly be ignored, the tendency was to minimise their impact upon 'secular' genres. The two major props of this interpretation were the Indo-European hypothesis and theories about the oral composition and backward looking nature of various epic literatures such as the Homeric poems of ancient Greece.

Increasingly intensive European involvement with India in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to a handful of western missionaries and administrators acquiring some knowledge of the sacred language of the Hindus, Sanskrit, and being struck by the notable similarities between it and the learned languages of Europe, Latin and Greek. The most influential and accurate early observation along these lines was made by Sir William Jones in 1786: "the *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists: there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the *Gothick* and the *Celtic*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the *Sanscrit*; and the old *Persian* might be added to the same family, if this were the place for discussing any question concerning the antiquities of *Persia*" (e.g. Muller, 1986, 1-2). This notion of a genetic relationship between Sanskrit and various European languages was taken up with enthusiasm in Germany, where the nascent romantic movement was stimulating interest and pride in tracing linguistic and cultural origins as far back as possible. In the course of the nineteenth century the inventory of related languages was established with ever greater precision and methods for comparison between them and reconstruction of the forms of the unattested parent language, termed *Indogermanisch* in German but *Indo-European* or the like otherwise, were steadily refined. By the end of the century the major languages or language groups recognised as Indo-European were *Indo-Iranian* (Sanskrit, Avestan, Old Persian etc.), *Greek*, *Italic* (Latin and less well attested languages such as Oscan and Umbrian), *Germanic* (Gothic, Scandinavian, German, English etc.), *Celtic* (Irish,

the three British languages Welsh, Cornish and Breton, plus fragmentarily attested Continental Celtic, notably Gaulish), *Slavic* (Old Church Slavonic, Russian, Polish etc.), *Baltic* (Lithuanian, Latvian, Old Prussian), *Armenian* and *Albanian*. The early twentieth century saw the significant additions of *Tocharian* (6th-8th centuries A.D.) from Chinese Turkestan and *Anatolian* (notably Hittite with texts from the second millenium B.C.) from Asia Minor to the canon.

It can, then, be rigorously demonstrated that the linguistic affinities of Irish are firstly with other languages of the Celtic group and that this in turn is part of a much wider family descended from a hypothetical common parent termed Indo-European. The details hardly require exposition here but some importance attaches to the fact that a shared language is usually held to imply cultural community or penetration on a broader scale. From this it would follow that Ireland's Celtic and Indo-European heritage extended beyond the strictly linguistic sphere to other facets of culture such as law, institutions, mythology or oral literary techniques. In the field of ideology a particularly influential theory has been the one elaborated over the years since the late thirties by Georges Dumézil, who has identified a tripartite scheme of socio-mythological functions in ancient India, namely *sovereignty* in its twin magico-religious and contractual aspects, *warfare* and *fecundity*, and has sought to establish its Indo-European provenance by isolating evidence for similar structures in other branches, including Celtic (cf. Littleton, 1973). Aided by a nativist enthusiasm for things Indian to be discussed below, the impact of this approach upon medieval Irish studies has been considerable of late and is, perhaps, most apparent in the work of Alwyn and Brinley Rees (1961). However, comparisons between Ireland and India alone hardly suffice to put the Indo-European provenance of various motifs and institutions beyond reasonable doubt, and the Dumézilian approach may be criticised for setting too much store by the Indian evidence. Where possible, a wider range of Indo-European literatures should be compared simultaneously in the interests of more balanced socio-mythological reconstruction, and it has recently been argued that the results call for significant modification of Dumézil's model (McCone, 1987). The importance of tripartition in early Irish ideology will emerge at various points in this book, but one should beware of facile assumptions about Indo-European origins and correlations with the Dumézilian system.

3. Studies by Albert Lord (1960) and Denys Page (1959) in the late fifties had a major impact upon attitudes to the Homeric poems and led to emphasis upon formulaic oral composition and transmission, the secondary and essentially uncreative later role of writing in their survival, and the ability of such a strictly regulated oral tradition to preserve a reasonably accurate, if patchy, record of earlier social and political conditions over a long period. This approach was applied to early Irish saga by Jackson in a small but influential book published in 1964, page 4 of which states the basic hypothesis succinctly as follows: "the immediate setting of the oldest hero tales, that is to say the state of endemic warfare between Ulster and the rest of Ireland and various other features of the Irish political construction, material civilization, and way of life, which are very archaic in appearance, very circumstantial, and on the whole very consistent, belong to a period some centuries older than the time when they were first written down - belong in fact to a *pre*historic Ireland".

If the premise is granted, this basic picture can only have been preserved orally until it entered an apparently equally reactionary written record, but recent anthropological studies of oral traditions have tended to stress the decisive role of contemporary social and political factors in shaping them. Thus according to Jack Goody "it seems probable, at least, that the form in which non-literate societies conceive the world of the past is itself influenced by the process of transmission described. The Tiv have their genealogies, others their sacred tales about the origin of the world and the way in which man acquired his culture. But all their conceptualizations of the past cannot help being governed by the concerns of the present, merely because there is no body of chronologically ordered statements to which reference can be made. The Tiv do not recognized any contradiction between what they say now and what they said fifty years ago, since no enduring record exists for them to set beside their present views. Myth and history merge into one: the elements in the cultural heritage which cease to have a contemporary relevance tend to be soon forgotten or transformed; and as the individuals of each generation acquire their vocabulary, their genealogies, and their myths, they are unaware that various words, proper names and stories have dropped out, or that others have changed their meanings or been replaced" (1968, 34). In the same vein Jan Vansina states: "oral traditions are conditioned by the society in which they flourish. It follows therefore that no oral tradition can transcend the boundaries of the social system in which it exists" (1973, 172). Finally, Ruth Finnegan makes a poignant protest along similar lines: "because primitive tribes were supposed to be preoccupied with tradition rather than innovation, 'traditional' tales were sought and 'new' ones ignored or explained away. Because interest was focused on broad evolutionary stages, few questions were asked about the idiosyncratic history, culture, or literary conventions of a particular people. Finally because origins and early history assumed such importance in people's minds, there was little emphasis on the *contemporary* relevance of a piece of literature" (1970, 37).

As a representative of what Joseph Nagy has called "the emerging new school of Celticists who share an 'oral traditionalist' appreciation of medieval Irish literature" (1983, 130), Edgar Slotkin has put the nub of the matter thus: "was Celtic literature which originated in the pre-Christian period preserved meaninglessly? I think not. It had an audience which appreciated and understood it at some level other than pre-Christian myth. Our perfectly legitimate interests in the pre-Christian codes have tended to blind us to the codes tales carried at the time they were written down" (1983, 222). This type of approach has recently been applied by N.B. Aitchison to extant 'Ulster Cycle' tales, his conclusion being "that these sources are neither the literary transcriptions of Iron Age oral traditions, nor do they offer a 'window' on Iron Age society. Instead, the study of the processes behind the composition and transmission of this literature represents a remarkable potential addition to our knowledge of secular and religious affairs in north-eastern Ireland during the second half of the first millenium A.D." (1987, 87). It can now be regarded as axiomatic that, assumed oral origins for some of its constituents notwithstanding, the proper frame of reference for early Irish literature is early Christian Ireland rather than the preceding pagan period.

Nevertheless, the attractions of orality to nativist scholars have been such that it has been accorded pride of place even in the evaluation of written material without attested oral parallels, as when Gerard Murphy states that "though our knowledge

of ancient Irish storytelling comes mainly from manuscript versions of the tales, there can be little doubt that Irish narrative tradition has on the whole been essentially oral" (1961, 5-6). Moreover, "when we think of the well-constructed narratives which even the unlearned peasant narrator to-day can produce, and when we judge of the greater power of Old Irish story-tellers by consideration of certain passages scattered through the inartistic manuscript versions of their tales which have been preserved, we can be fairly certain that the tales, as really told to assembled kings and noblemen at an ancient *óenach*, were very different from the poorly-narrated manuscript versions noted down by monastic scribes as a contribution to learning rather than to literature" (ibid., 8). Mac Cana confidently refers to "official tradition, whether oral or written (though in the insular Celtic context it remained mainly oral even after the introduction of writing)" (1971, 109) after making substantially the same claim in scholastic guise: "the more closely one studies these early tales in their written form, the more one is persuaded that they are in substance, if not always in the accidents of style, a fair reflection of the oral narrative of pre-literate tradition" (ibid., 97-8). Referring to the story of Cenn Fáelad's pioneering literary activities in the seventh century, Ó Coileáin asserts that "in some such way oral learning came to be launched on its uncertain journey through time, some of it to reach the twentieth century out of a past that has no real beginning. Nor should the writing of a text of whatever kind be seen as somehow marking the end of an oral tradition; rather, it has captured it, however imperfectly, at a given point in its life cycle" (1985, 526b).

Prior to the acquisition of the Roman alphabet along with organised Christianity in the fifth century Ireland was to all intents and purposes a non-literate society. Consequently oral tradition is the sole possibility for the preceding period and is hardly likely to have been eradicated by the introduction of limited, if expanding, clerical and monastic literacy from the fifth century onwards. The fact remains, however, that we have no direct knowledge of this presumed oral tradition and that what have come down to us from the period in question are exclusively the written products of the monastically educated. To deny that these were influenced by and drew upon an oral tradition with pagan roots would be as fatuous as the unprovable and unsupported nativist assumptions about the dominant role of orality and paganism in the creation of the so-called 'secular' genres of this monastic literature. *A priori* arguments about the role of an unattested oral tradition in the constitution of an abundantly documented literary record evidently put the cart before the horse as far as methodology is concerned, and all too often substitute vague speculation for solid inferences founded upon scrutiny of the texts themselves.

The main objection to nativist attitudes towards early Irish literature is that they preclude the appreciation of this vast material in its own terms by treating it as a more or less haphazard, imperfect and unthinkingly antiquarian inky precipitation out of an infinitely richer and more extensive oral solution. As Donnchadh Ó Corráin has pointedly remarked of late, "far too often, the modern critics - on generally unspoken grounds of aesthetics, good order, propriety or some such - are prepared to be harsh in their judgements on the scholars who transmitted their texts to them. We hear and read a great deal about scribal clumsiness, late and corrupt texts (as if there were once a gleaming fault-free archetype), careless and contradictory patchwork and the awkward merging of different recensions which should, indeed, have been kept apart. The implication is that those who transmitted, re-

edited, re-wrote or merely copied a text were, to a greater or lesser degree, mindless conduits of a Great Tradition whose intelligence and taste was, of course, much inferior both to that of their modern critics and to that of the founders of the tradition itself" (1986, 141).

These views tie in well with recent trends in other disciplines, such as the reaction in biblical studies to the atomistic tendencies of the so-called 'higher criticism' in vogue since the nineteenth century. As Robert Alter and Frank Kermode have put it, "the characteristic move was to infer the existence of some book that preceded the one we have - the lost documents that were compiled to make Genesis as it has come down to us, the lost Aramaic Gospel, the lost "sayings source" used by Matthew and Luke and so on. The effect of this practice was curious: one spoke of the existing books primarily as evidence of what must once have been available in an original closer to what actually happened. That was their real value - as substitutes for what had unfortunately been lost" (1987, 3). Thus "the biblical texts were valued less for what they actually were than for what they told us about other putative texts or events to which there was no direct access. What has happened now is that the interpretation of the texts as they actually exist has been revalidated" (ibid., 4). Similarly Northrop Frye maintains "that textual scholarship has never really developed the 'higher' criticism that made such a noise in the nineteenth century. Instead of emerging from lower criticism, or textual study, most of it dug itself into a still lower, or sub-basement, criticism, criticism in which disintegrating the text became an end in itself. As a result its essential discoveries were made quite early, and were followed by a good deal of straw-thrashing. There are any number of books, for example, telling us that the account of creation with which the Book of Genesis opens comes from the priestly narrative, much the latest of the four or five documents that make up the book. A genuine higher criticism, I should think, would observe that this account of creation stands at the beginning of Genesis, despite its late date, because it belongs at the beginning of Genesis. That would lead to an integrated study of the Book of Genesis, and eventually the whole Bible, as it now stands, concerning itself with the question of why the Bible as we know it emerged in that particular form" (1982, xvii). There are encouraging signs that the study of medieval Irish texts is likewise emerging from a troglodyte phase.

4. In view of the overwhelming evidence that the so-called medieval Irish 'ecclesiastical' genres, whether in Latin or the vernacular, provide for vigorous and wide ranging intellectual activity from at least the sixth century onwards, the passive approach allegedly adopted by the same monastic learned class towards the native oral tradition obviously required some explanation. One response was to endow them with a suspiciously modern and disinterested desire to record the remnants of a moribund pagan tradition. Thus Murphy castigates "poorly narrated manuscript versions noted down by monastic scribes as a contribution to learning rather than to literature" above, Ó Coileáin speaks of "antiquarians assembling, as best they could, pieces of a rapidly fragmenting past" (1985, 521b), and according to Mac Cana "it is well known that early Irish churchmen were remarkably liberal and sympathetic in their attitude to pagan tradition and that were it not for their goodwill and enthusiasm it would have gone the way of most oral tradition in a changing and literate world. But this is not to say that the monastic recording of native tradition was free of censorship, and there is in fact clear indication of such censorship in

the absence of material whose former existence is implicit in the extant literature" (1971, 99).

Statements such as these are all the more surprising in view of good evidence that the attitude of early Irish clerics to paganism was unenthusiastic, to say the least. For instance, Patrick's later seventh-century biographer Tírechán links a number of native expressions and customs with paganism, contrasts these with monastic usage and describes the suppression of undesirable pagan practices by the saint (e.g. 12, 26 (17-21), 32 in Bieler, 1979). Equally noteworthy is the consistent condemnation of contemporary druidism and associated lifestyles with pagan connotations as diabolical practices in our sources, of which more in chapter nine. Moreover, the triumphalist author of *Félire Oengusso* around 800 A.D. notes with grim satisfaction that "the great kings of the pagans wail ever in burning: the hosts of Jesus without a fall, they are joyous after triumph" (Prol. 61-4) and illustrates his claim that even in Ireland "the Faith has grown, it will abide until the Day of Judgement: guilty pagans are carried off, their forts are not inhabited" (173-6) by contrasting the desolate pagan royal sites of Tara, Crúachu, Ailenn and Emain with the bustling monasteries of Armagh, Clonmacnoise, Kildare and Glendalough. Such by no means untypical attitudes do not square easily with a desire to preserve a written record of the pagan past for its own sake. There is no sign here of the 'benign ecumenism' towards certain pagan beliefs that Mac Cana (1976, 95-8) ascribes to the Christian authors of the extant versions of *Immram Brain* and *Echtrae Chonlai,* and Carney has rightly insisted that "there can be no question of regarding these stories as semi-sacred compositions, transmitted for centuries in an almost unvarying form and finally 'written down' by an enthusiastic antiquarian with the scientific approach and attitude of a modern student of ethnography" (1955, 277).

As far as T.F. O'Rahilly was concerned, the monastic recorders of these pagan traditions, far from being broad-minded conservationists, had insidiously subversive aims. Thus "our Irish pseudo-historians were thoroughgoing euhemerists; so, too, were the inventors of the pre-Christian parts of our genealogies. By thus humanizing and mortalizing the divinities of pagan Ireland, they hoped to eradicate the pagan beliefs that still lingered on among many of their countrymen" (1946, 261). By way of illustration in the field of saga, "*Esnada Tige Buchet* is thus one of the most striking examples we have in Irish of how a tale, originally mythic, can in the course of time be stripped of all its pagan characteristics. All trace of the supernatural and the mysterious has been eliminated; and indeed the story is told in the most prosaic and matter-of-fact way. In harmony with the period of pseudo-history in which the action is made to take place, no element of Christianity is permitted to intrude" (1952, 19). Since, however, supernatural beings and features occur abundantly in the sagas, as will become clear later, these early Irish clerks are scarcely more convincing as totalitarians than as liberals. Moreover, one might well ask supporters of both views why monastic writers should have gone to the trouble of saving the debris of a pagan tradition from imminent extinction and then imposed a distinctly haphazard censorship, whether "of selective silence" (Mac Cana, 1979, 460) or worse, in order to hasten the demise of those very beliefs and practices.

Clearly we need a better explanation for this monastic activity than either of these flawed approaches can provide, but the quest for this will be left until the next two chapters. A further desideratum in line with Ó Corráin's strictures above is the avoidance of patronising assumptions that in various fields of vernacular litera-

ture the artistic and intellectual aspirations of early Christian Irish scribes hardly went beyond the more or less garbled reproduction of alleged oral pagan originals. All too often such attitudes have led to cavalier treatments geared to restoring an assumed older or oral 'original' rather than to interpreting what is actually attested in writing, but fortunately the main trend of late has been to attach increasing value to the contemporary import and structural integrity of extant texts. As the following chapters should show, the results speak for themselves and point to a profoundly literary tradition that had developed its own momentum in the monasteries from an early period, regardless of the probable or possible pre-Christian roots of many of its constituents (cf. Aitchison, 1987, 93-103).

5. A major nativist tenet closely connected with insistence upon orally transmitted pagan survivals is that early medieval Irish society and literature were remarkably archaic and conservative until rudely roused from their naturally supine state by foreign intruders, notably the Vikings in the ninth and the Normans in the twelfth century. The classic statement of this view regarding the impact of the Vikings on the Irish body politic is Binchy's 'The Passing of the Old Order' (1962). This celebrated article depicts a pre-ninth-century Ireland in which "the political and administrative unit had been the tribal state, or *túath*, a very small territory ruled by a king (*rí*), whose status and functions had remained strikingly similar to those which modern anthropologists attribute to the old Indo-European tribal king" (122). Such monarchs "had very limited 'governmental' functions within the territory" (123) on an island that was, politically speaking, merely "a *congerie* of tribal states tenuously linked together in five larger groups" (126). Happily, however, this political fragmentation did not lead to constant internecine conflicts because "in pre-Norse times, all wars, inter-tribal and inter-provincial alike, followed a curiously ritual pattern. They were hedged around with taboos: one did not continue the fight after after one's king had been slain; one did not annex the enemy's territory or confiscate any of their lands; one did not dethrone the 'sacred' tribal dynasty; one refrained from attacking a number of 'neutral zones' on enemy soil – the monastic settlements, the property of the learned castes (*áes dána*), and so on" (128). It was the refusal of the unsporting Northmen to play by the local rules that led to the disintegration of this cosy system by setting the natives a bad example.

It is dangerous to extrapolate from legal ideals to actual practice in this manner. After all, the notion that rules are made to be broken is a familiar one and it would, for instance, be unwise to deduce from a law prohibiting homicide that murder was unknown or even merely rare in the society in question. The annals provide far better evidence for what was going on in the real world and have been duly used by Ó Corráin to show "that in the eighth century and possibly earlier the independent legal position of the *túath* or petty tribal kingdom was being steadily eroded by the greater overlords" (1972, 29) and "that long before the Viking attacks the dominant dynasties ruthlessly expelled and extruded less powerful peoples, and intervened to their advantage in the domestic struggles of their inferiors" (ibid., 30). It thus appears "that the *túath* and its king, the tribal kingdom with its privileges and the sacred tribal king with his taboos, had become things of the past long before the year 800. Ireland had become (if in reality it was ever otherwise, I doubt) a land of dynastic overlordship in which the kings of the paramount dynasties extended their authority and their kindred in every direction which their resources allowed"

(ibid., 31). More recently Patrick Wormald has lodged an incisive protest against the 'outlandish' notion that "an early Irish king was a priestly vegetable; he tells more of the distant past than of the historical development of European monarchy" (1986, 153).

Various points to be made in subsequent chapters should chime in well with these substantial arguments that early medieval Irish kingship was a good deal more normal and up to date by contemporary European standards than nativists like to admit. Meanwhile two examples of the considerable authority wielded by a provincial monarch over his sub-kings even in the later seventh and early eighth centuries must suffice.

Críth Gablach, par. 38, lists various types of *rechtgae* or "legal ordinance" a king can impose upon his *túatha* in the wake of military defeat or pestilence. The plural *túatha* "kingdoms" clearly points to an overking, as does the third category "a king's ordinance (*rechtgae ríg*), as is the ordinance of the king of Cashel (*rechtgae ríg Caisil*) in Munster. For there are three ordinances that are proper for a king to pledge on his *túatha*: an ordinance for expulsion of a foreign race, i.e. against the Saxons, an ordinance for the preparation of crops, a law of the faith that enkindles, as is the law of Adomnán". As Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha's meticulous study of the guarantor list of *Cáin Adomnáin* itself shows (1982), great provincial kings, supported by various of their more important sub-kings, played a crucial role in the promulgation of ecclesiastical *cána* (cf. Herbert, 1988, 51), as when the exiled abbot Artrí of Armagh "proceeded to proclaim the *Cáin Phátraic* in Munster in 823 (*AU*) with the support of king Feidlimid mac Crimthainn of Cashel and again in 'the three Connachts' in 825 (*AU*)" (McCone, 1984, 317).

St. Brigit's hagiographer Cogitosus provides the following social context, which was evidently meant to seem plausible to his readers, for one of her posthumous miracles (par. 33 in Bollandus, 1658, 140; par. 30 in Connolly and Picard, 1987, 23-4). The king of Brigit's home province (*patria*) of Leinster issued "an edict throughout the petty kingdoms and sub-provinces which were under his authority and yoke (*edictum per plebes* [= OIr. *túatha*?] *et provincias* [= OIr. *mór-thúatha*?] *quae sub eius erant ditione et iugo*)" for the building of a major road. "When many peoples came by kindreds and families (*conuenientibus multis populis* [= OIr. *túatha*?] *per cognationes* [= OIr. *cenéla*?] *et familias* [= OIr. *fini*?]), they divided the work up among themselves. Here, surely, we see the *túath* and smaller subdivisions within it functioning as subordinate links in an efficient chain of provincial command rather than as loosely federated independent units owing little more than nominal allegiance to an over-king.

Early Christian Irish society was intensely competitive in the upper echelons, both lay and clerical, about which we are best informed. Great monasteries as well as, and usually in tandem with, great dynasties were concerned to extend their power and influence (see ch. 10, 5), and warfare, far from being "rather like a ritual game" (Binchy, 1970, 17), was a deadly serious instrument for furthering political ambitions. For example, the Annals of Ulster (*AU*) record battles fought by Clonmacnoise against the monastery of Birr in 760 and the Columban house of Durrow in 764. We are told that on the latter occasion Durrow lost no less than two hundred members of its community. Internal monastic conflicts could be savage enough on occasion and might have wider repercussions. Thus the Annals of Tigernach (*AT*) record "the slaying of bishop Echthigern by a priest at the altar of Brigit, as a result

of which a priest does not perform mass in the presence of a bishop in Kildare" in 760 and state that the "battle of Emain Machae between the Ulaid and the Southern Uí Néill" in 759 was caused by a dispute between a priest of Armagh and his abbot. Whether secular, monastic or mixed, such conflicts can hardly be described as "nothing more than punitive expeditions by an over-king to levy by force tribute which had been withheld by a subordinate" or as "just examples of the *crech*, the armed raid for booty, chiefly livestock" (Binchy, 1954, 65).

Indeed, political motivation is apparent in many of the wars and battles that figure so prominently in the annals, both before and after the coming of the Vikings, and clearly involved considerable casualties on occasion. Thus the Annals of Ulster record "an encounter between the Munstermen and the Uí Néill, and Donnchad (of Clann Cholmáin, soon to be king of Tara) did great devastation in the territories of the Munstermen and many of the Munstermen fell" as well as "a battle in (the monastery of) Clonard between Donnchad and the community of Clonard" in 775, while in 793 we learn of "the outraging of Fáendelach by Gormgal son of Dindanach and the entry and invasion of Armagh and slaughter of people there by the Uí Chremthain (of the Clogher area). The reception of Fáendelach into Armagh again" (cf. McCone, 1984, 311-9). The notice of the battle of Allen in 722 records the deaths of a number of lesser kings on both sides as well as that of the defeated Cenél nÉogain king of Tara, Fergal mac Máele Dúin, whose designs upon Leinster were thus thwarted. Fergal's son and successor in the Tara kingship, Áed Allán, defeated the Cenél Conaill in 732 and fought them again in 733 and 734 in what was evidently a struggle for paramountcy among the Northern Uí Néill that went the Cenél nÉogain's way. Having secured his western flank, Áed turned his attentions eastwards to the Ulaid, whom he defeated in 735. In the same year there was a battle between Munster and the Laigin or Leinstermen "in which many of the Laigin and almost countless Munstermen perished". At last Áed was ready for the final stroke of a carefully laid strategy and fought the battle of Áth Senaig against the Laigin in 738. After the death of the king of the Leinstermen the wounded Áed's followers "were granted an enormous victory when they put their Leinster rivals to flight, trample, prostrate, overthrow and destroy them in extraordinary manner so that almost the whole enemy army is annihilated."

One wonders what those involved in this and similar actions recorded in the pre-Viking annals would have made of Mac Cana's recent suggestion that "one might almost describe the endemic warfare of early Ireland as 'harmless', for, while it could be barbarous, its primary aim was like that of the modern riot weapon: to sting and to stun but not to kill" (1982, 207). On the whole, it seems unlikely that the Irish of this period had much to learn from the Vikings about military ruthlessness, political aggrandisement or attacking monasteries. Far from being populated by primitive savages, whether noble or otherwise, early medieval Ireland had developed what Patrick J. Corish has termed "an integrated and confident Christian culture" (1972, 7) that was, to be sure, not without its peculiarities but seems to have enjoyed reasonably normal levels of intrigue and violence by the standards of the time and in some important respects to have stood in the vanguard of western Europe's emergence from the Dark Ages. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the field of monastic learning.

6. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* III, iv-v, informs us that around the middle of the

seventh century St. Columba's foundation of Iona was at the head of an extensive monastic federation or *paruchia* with houses in Ireland, Scotland and Northumbria. Apart from Iona itself in the Inner Hebrides this included such major centres as Durrow in the Irish Midlands and Lindisfarne just off the coast of northeast England, a situation that has now been thoroughly discussed along with subsequent vicissitudes down to the twelfth century by Máire Herbert (1988, 9-126). Bede III, xix, tells of the Irish saint Fursae's foundation of the monastery of Cnobheresburg in East Anglia in the first half of the sixth century. This he left in the hands of his brother Fáelán before proceeding to the north of Clovis's kingdom, present-day Belgium, to found the monastery in which he died. His remains were subsequently translated to Péronne, where his brothers Fáelán and Ultán apparently held the abbacy (Kenney, 1929, 501-5). When in the aftermath of the Synod of Whitby in 664 the Irish presence under abbot Colmán was withdrawn from Lindisfarne, Bede IV, iv, records that about thirty English religious followed him back to Ireland, where Colmán founded the monastery of Inishboffin off the Mayo coast. Subsequent tensions between the Irish and English contingents caused Colmán to relocate the latter in a new foundation, Mag nÉo (Mayo), which had become a notable monastery with English occupants by the first half of the eighth century. Indeed, Bede III, xxvii, states categorically of later seventh-century Ireland that "there were many aristocrats and commoners of the English race there at that time who, having left their native island in the time of bishops Finian and Colmán, had departed thither for the sake of sacred reading or a more continent life. And, indeed, certain of them soon bound themselves faithfully to the monastic way of life, while others rather took pleasure in attention to reading by wandering around the churches of teachers. All of these the Irish received gladly and gave daily sustenance as well as seeing to the provision of books for reading and free tuition".

Particularly good evidence of Irish cultural attainments and impact abroad in the late sixth and early seventh centuries is provided by the career and writings of St. Columbanus, a monk of Bangor in northeast Ireland who spent the last twenty-five years or so of his life on the Continent with Irish followers. During this eventful part of his career he founded monasteries in Alsace before losing the Merovingian monarch's favour, travelled through Switzerland, where his disciple St. Gall stayed to establish the monastery bearing his name, and finally established the major monastery of Bobbio in the Lombard kingdom of northern Italy shortly before his death in 615. Columbanus' writings, which have been edited and translated with introduction by G.S.M. Walker (1957), comprise impressive, if at times rather florid, Latin prose and poetry, reveal an extremely forceful and uncompromising personality, and display deep scriptural erudition along with a good knowledge of patristic literature and major classical authors. It seems virtually certain that these accomplishments were acquired in his native country, and it is hard to resist quoting a passage from the fourth paragraph of his first letter to Pope Gregory the Great (reigned 590-604) that illustrates his wit, style, knowledge of Scripture, confidence in Irish learning and lack of bashfulness. Defending Irish practices, by now at variance with those of the Continent, regarding calculation of the date of Easter, Columbanus derives a delicious and barely translatable pun upon Pope Leo's name from Ecclesiastes 9:4 (*melior est canis vivus leone mortuo*, "a living dog is better than a dead lion"): "perhaps, while you fear to incur the stamp of Hermagorean innovation, you are content with the authority of your predecessors and especially

of Pope Leo (*antecessorum et maxime papae Leonis auctoritate contentus es*). Do not, I beg, yield yourself on such an issue to diffidence or propriety, which are often deceived: in this problem a living dog is perhaps better than a leonine corpse (*melior forte est canis vivus in hoc problemate leone mortuo*). For a living saint can correct things that have not been corrected by another earlier. For you should know that Victorius has not been accepted by our teachers and Irish scholars of old and computists most learned in making calculation".

The works of Isidore of Seville (+636), particularly the famous *Etymologiae sive Origines* compiled as a kind of encyclopaedia of current knowledge during the last years of his life, are known to have exercised a major influence throughout medieval western Europe. This esteem was particularly marked in early Christian Ireland, where the Etymologies were known as the *Cu(i)lmen(n)* or 'summit' of learning and were supposedly acquired in exchange for the most highly regarded native literary product, the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, according to an account surviving in different versions in the Book of Leinster (*LL* 32878-32909, trans. Kinsella, 1970, 1-2) and elsewhere (Thurneysen, 1921, 251-4). J.N. Hilgarth has pointed out that, whereas use of Isidore outside Spain is scarcely attested in other parts of Europe before the early eighth century, "there is a long series of Irish Latin seventh-century authors, many of whom cite Isidore" (1984, 7), surely an eloquent testimony to the Christian Irish establishment's openness to external influences and interest in the latest scholarly trends at this time. Cosmopolitan and up to date as it was for the period, early medieval Irish scholarship enjoyed a high international reputation that goes a long way towards explaining the demand for recipients of an Irish monastic education in Carolingian Europe during the eighth and ninth centuries and beyond (Tierney, 1967, 1-17) and the substantial corpus of Latin literature produced by Irish men of letters both at home and abroad during this long period (Kenney, 1929, 486-621; Lapidge and Sharpe, 1985, 77-221). Indeed, at various times and in various concentrations Irish connections with Britain, France, the Low Countries, Southern Germany, Switzerland, Bohemia, Northern Italy and Spain can be established between the late sixth and late ninth centuries of our era (cf. the map in L. and M. de Paor, 1978, 69).

In view of these bracing perspectives it comes as something as a shock to be told that during this period Ireland as a whole was an isolated cultural backwater clinging unquestioningly to remarkably archaic practices and perceptions disturbed only by the occasional intrusion of more advanced foreigners. Binchy, for instance, claims that "the conservatism which philologists have often noted as a feature of the Irish language is paralleled in Irish law, and largely for the same reason. Between the Goedelic conquest and the Norse invasions Ireland remained insulated from the impact of foreign peoples, in other words from the most powerful factors making for legal change" (1943, 21). In still more general terms the Celts have been viewed as "peoples of the periphery whose achievements lay more in the spiritual and ideological than in the material and political fields, quintessential conservatives who maintained a tradition that was more Indo than European and who, when they innovated through borrowing, so transformed their borrowings as to make them hardly distinguishable from native idiom" (Mac Cana, 1982, 205). Thus "it would", in Ó Coileáin's words, "be difficult to overstate the inherently conservative nature of Irish medieval literature" (1985, 527b). Still more recently Gearóid Mac Eoin has invoked modern philistinism as a means of summarily dismissing the

incontrovertible evidence for medieval Irish scholars' major achievements in Latin letters: "the Romans never found time to invade Ireland, which is certainly the most important non-event in Irish history. Nonetheless, the Latin language made its appearance, spoken first by Christian missionaries and later by native churchmen who were probably no better at it than their twentieth-century successors who have breathed a great sigh of relief at its disappearance from the liturgy and the educational system" (1988, 595).

Given the phenomenal success of the Irish church in establishing within a mere hundred years or so of Patrick's fifth-century mission a forceful and flourishing monastic culture capable of importing and adapting the latest trends in scholarship from abroad and of exporting its own personnel and products to Britain and Europe, one can only ask with Wormald "whether (and if so, why) a civilization whose representatives have widely been believed to have changed the cultural destinies of north-western Europe can itself have been relatively impervious to its own message" (1986, 151). In a recent book that is at least useful as a compendium of nativist misapprehensions Michael Richter concedes that a "feature that marked Ireland very strongly was the openness of society to intellectual and cultural influences from outside" but envisages an effective counter to this in "the existence of a non-Latin intellectual tradition in Ireland from prehistoric times". This leads to claims of a type often made (e.g. by Mac Cana, 1982, 215) but never substantiated: "in the face of an incoming Latin civilisation, as it was then current in the Church, this tradition continued unbroken . . . All this was made possible by the existence of a socially respected and privileged intellectual élite which had developed from an archaic stage of culture in prehistoric times. The survival of this élite in Christian times is partly due to the fact that classical Roman civilisation could not, as elsewhere, eclipse and largely destroy things non-Roman and pre-Roman. Because of this, the archaic features of Irish society could become dynamic in the Middle Ages . . . Should all this be so, then the history of Ireland in the Middle Ages shows that there was a viable alternative development to that of the rest of Europe, dominated by Christian Latin culture" (Richter, 1988, 192-3).

It should emerge below and in subsequent chapters that the apparent discrepancy between Irish clerical attitudes at home and abroad is, as Wormald suspects, the child of modern fancy rather than medieval fact, but first we must turn our attention to the Orient.

7. Ancient India has long held a powerful fascination for scholars with nativist leanings as a favourite source of cultural and literary comparisons with early medieval Ireland aimed at demonstrating the impressive and surprisingly pristine condition of the latter's Indo-European heritage. Versed as he was in Sanskrit as well as Irish, Dillon made several classic presentations of this position, including lectures published with such significant titles as 'The Archaism of Irish Tradition' (1947) and 'Celt and Hindu' (1973). The basic aim of the former appears on page 9: "M. Vendryes referred to features of morphology and vocabulary which Celtic shares with Sanskrit, and drew the conclusion that they indicate the archaic character of these languages and the survival east and west of ancient religious institutions. It is the theory which I am here attempting to confirm and to extend; and I would merely add that in the light of other evidence those points of agreement between Sanskrit and Celtic have an importance rather greater than Vendryes would

seem to attach to them, for they are part of a much wider measure of common tradition". On page 4 of the later work a theoretical framework was posited with reference to attempts in the field of dialect geography to identify "central areas, lateral areas and isolated areas, of which the first are sources of innovation and the last two are refuges of archaism", the basic claim being "that this method can be applied not merely to language, to the names of institutions, but to the institutions themselves; and the model has an obvious use when we are observing Ireland and India, at opposite ends of the Indo-European areas, when we are comparing Celtic with Vedic Sanskrit, Celt and Hindu".

This methodological approach has found considerable favour. For example, Binchy states of the Old Irish law tracts that he is "more than ever convinced of their importance as a record of archaic society" because "the Irish as well as the Hindu jurists were 'backward-looking' - men with a profound respect for antiquity" (1970, 1). Consequently in an Indo-European context there is a contrast "between Hindu and Irish law on the one hand and the dynamic legal systems, the Welsh as well as the Roman and the English, on the other" and "it is the Hindu and Irish jurists who, precisely owing to their lack of legal realism, can now give much more valuable information to social anthropologists" (ibid., 2). Mac Cana speaks of "Indian tradition, which otherwise preserves so many close analogues of items in insular Celtic tradition" (1972, 137) and has probably gone further down this particular path than anyone else. Richter similarly avers that "the reference to India is not arbitrary, nor are the parallels coincidental; remains of Indo-European civilisation have been preserved on the eastern fringes of the region influenced by Indo-European culture and, on the outer western fringes, in Ireland; they were preserved into historical times" (1988, 24).

However, the foundations of this 'Indo-Celtic' theory appear rather shaky on closer inspection. To begin with, dialect geography deals with areas such as present-day France where local speech variants are part of a continuum of mutual intelligibility at a given point in time, whereas the major attested Indo-European languages or language families meet neither criterion: the dates of their earliest adequate documentation vary enormously (e.g. Hittite c. 1600 B.C., Greek c. 1400 B.C., Vedic Sanskrit c. 1000 B.C., Latin c. 300 B.C., Gothic c. 350 A.D., Old Irish c. 650 A.D.) and there is no question of mutual comprehension. One can hardly, for instance, apply insights of dialect geography to two languages and cultures such as those of early Christian Ireland and Vedic India separated from each other spatially by numerous other language areas, some Indo-European and others not, and temporally by over one and a half millenia. Such notions would only be relevant to a hypothetical period of Indo-European linguistic unity, and we have no reason to suppose that the precursors of Celtic or Indo-Iranian had either begun to separate out as dialects or were in any sense peripheral at that stage. Moreover, the Celts first emerge into the light of history from the cultural melting pot of central Europe and may well not have reached Ireland more than two or three centuries B.C. (cf. Greene, 1983; Piggott, 1983). There is nothing very 'marginal' or 'isolated' about this formative phase of Celtic prehistory.

It is, moreover, doubtful whether Celtic or Old Irish can be meaningfully regarded as 'archaic' Indo-European dialects. Recent linguistic researches suggest that Celtic, like Indo-Iranian, can be accounted for in terms of a perfectly mainstream Indo-European prototype (e.g. Rix, 1977; McCone, 1986). Where a

given feature such as the Old Irish reduplicated future and the Old Indic reduplicated desiderative (McCone, 1986, 248-55) is peculiar to both and is too circumstantial to have arisen independently, it can be ascribed with confidence to the parent language, Indo-European, for the simple reason that there is no plausible later point of common origin. In other words, it is the nature of the evidence and not the allegedly intrinsic archaism of peripheral areas that validates such conclusions. A concrete example in the sphere of vocabulary is the word for 'king' appearing in Celtic as Gaulish and (probably) Celtiberian *-rix*, Old Irish *rí* (gen. *ríg*) and Welsh *rhi*, in Latin as *rex* and in Sanskrit as *rāj-ā*. Allowing for regular sound changes established for the relevant languages (e.g. IE **ē* > Skt. *ā*, Celt. *ī*), these precise correspondences point ineluctably to an Indo-European stem **rēĝ-* (nom. sg. **rēĝ-s*), broadly meaning 'king' (cf. Binchy, 1970, 3), that is so far attested only towards the eastern and western extremes of the Indo-European world. Survival in this context merely implies phonetic continuity with a reconstructed prototype and by no means rules out change, which may be considerable as in Old Irish *én* 'bird' < **petnos*. Indeed, it is only an appreciation of the systematic changes involved that makes firm equations of this sort possible. The fact that changes in semantics and institutions cannot be formulated with the same precision is no excuse for ignoring them, and only makes the fullest possible documentation of the facts relevant to a comparison at this level all the more essential.

The survival of words relatively intact does not necessarily imply a corresponding stability in what they signify and conversely changes of designation do not always involve significant conceptual or institutional alterations. Consequently it would be rash to argue from the preservation of reflexes of **rēĝ-* that Celtic, Roman and Indian kingship was more archaic than that of other Indo-European peoples that have substituted other words or that the substitution of, say, *fían* for inherited *cuire* < IE **koryos* to designate the early Irish 'Männerbund' or society of unmarried young warrior-hunters significantly affected the institution itself (McCone, 1987, 110-18). Furthermore, relatively few precise cognates are attested anything like ubiquitously among the major recorded Indo-European languages, and one usually has to be content with a more limited distribution. All manner of permutations between two or three daughter languages are found, and it will hardly do to single out Indic (,Italic) and Celtic for special treatment, especially when new discoveries can radically alter the picture and show just how fortuitous the quirks of attestation may be. For instance, the Greek word *kheír* 'hand' had only one known cognate, Armenian *jeṙn*, at the beginning of the present century, and these two languages are arguably too closely related for the reconstruction of an Indo-European form on that basis despite reasonable assurance that the Indo-Europeans, who were manifestly blessed with palms (Lat. *palma*, Gk. *paláme*, OEng. *folm* 'palm', OIr. *lám*, W. *llaw* 'hand' < **plḥmā* 'palm'), had actually had hands and a word for them. As Hermann Hirt put it, "are we to assume that the Indo-Europeans had known snow and feet but not rain and hands? That, of course, is nonsense, and must cause us to exercise great caution in concluding anything from the absence of correspondences" (1927, 76). Indeed, the subsequent discovery of *kessar(as)* 'hand' in Hittite and *tsar*, *ṣar* 'hand' in Tocharian A and B respectively put the existence of Indo-European **gʰesr-* 'hand', from which the forms in all four of these languages derive, beyond doubt. Needless to say, one would hardly wish to argue on this basis that the Greeks, Armenians, Hittites and Tocharians bore a greater

manual affinity to their Indo-European forbears than the Indo-Iranians, Celts and so on or, indeed, that Celtic use of a derivative of **plhmā* for the whole hand reflects any widespread loss of fingers amongst them.

The truth is that there is no precise and necessary correlation between linguistic and broader cultural facts. Even if there were, a balanced appraisal of early Christian Ireland's linguistic heritage does not provide an encouraging analogy for those scholars inclined to stress her intense social and cultural conservatism. In comparison with Sanskrit, Greek or even Latin, the Irish language had by the time of the earliest substantial records in about the seventh century A.D. evolved very far indeed from the ancestral Indo-European prototype inferred by the comparative method. Profound changes in phonology, morphology and syntax had made Old Irish in some ways typologically closer to genetically unrelated verb-initial languages like Hebrew than to its ancient Celtic and Indo-European antecedents. Moreover, ecclesiastical influence can be detected in the shape of a not inconsiderable Latin input into the early medieval Irish vocabulary. In large measure this involved direct borrowings appropriately adapted to vernacular patterns of sound and inflection, e.g. OIr. *epscop* 'bishop' < Lat. *episcopus*, *scúap* 'broom' < *scopa*, *cásc* 'Easter' < *pascha*, *corcur* 'purple colour' < *purpura*, *eclais* 'church' < *ecclesia*, *senester* 'window' < *fenestra*, *póc* 'kiss' < *pacem* '(kiss of) peace', *léigend* 'reading, learning' < *legendum*, *penn* 'pen' < *penna* and so on. Recent studies by Damian McManus (e.g. 1983) have shown that this influx of Latin loanwords must have continued without serious interruption over a long period of time. It was, moreover, accompanied by a more subtle approach, correspondingly harder to detect, whereby native words were invested with latinized meanings either individually or in new combinations known as 'calques'. For instance, despite an Old Persian cognate *naiba-* 'splendid' proving pagan Indo-European and Celtic antecedents Old Irish *noíb* has been fully assimilated to Latin *sanctus* 'holy, saint' in the Christian sense, while a native word partly equivalent in meaning to a Latin counterpart might undergo expansion of its semantic range to make the match more complete, e.g. OIr. *bríathar* 'word' and then also 'verb' under the influence of Lat. *verbum* 'word, verb' or OIr. *cenél* 'race, kind' and then also 'gender' through assimilation to Lat. *genus* 'race, kind, gender'. The following are a few typical instances of the process of calquing, which entailed the fusion of two or occasionally three native words into a new larger unit capable of rendering a Latin term in vernacular guise: *con:éicnigedar* 'compels' (Lat. *com-pellit*), *con:éirig* 'arises (to attack)' (*con-surgit*), *remdéicsiu* 'fore-sight, providence' (*pro-videntia*), *etar-guide* 'intercession' (*intercessio*), *tairm-chruthud* 'transfiguration, transformation' (*trans-figuratio*, *transformatio*), *rem-eperthae* 'afore-said' (*prae-dictus*), *imm:díben* 'circumcises' (*circum-cidit*). It was even possible to calque Latin loans from Greek if the original etymology was known from Isidore or some other source. Thus Latin *Evangelium* 'Gospel' had been borrowed directly from Greek and Isidore duly states that "*Evangelium*, however, is interpreted as 'good news' (*bona adnuntatio*), for in Greek good is called *eû* and news *angelía*" (*Etym.* VI, ii 43). Armed with this etymological information, early medieval Irish men of letters came up with the erudite calque *soi-scélae*, literally 'good news', for 'Gospel', and this subsequently entered into common usage. Some learned creations of this type did not gain general acceptance, e.g. alongside common *epscop* the rare calque *for-décsam* 'bishop' (*CIH* 2213.22) inspired by Isidore's (*Etym.* VII, x 11-3) etymology

of originally Greek *episcopus* in Latin as 'over-seer, super-intendent' or the like.

Although at best a very approximate index of wider cultural processes, these linguistic considerations do lead us to expect something rather different from the reactionary milieu depicted by nativist studies of much vernacular Irish literature. Continuity with the pre-Christian past by no means precludes significant changes on the way, and Christian or ecclesiastical influence can operate beneath as well as upon the surface. Thus we may assume that native or native-looking elements could acquire new meanings relevant to the Church's teaching and practice in ideology or literature as well as in language either by varying degrees of reinterpretation or by rearrangement into new larger patterns.

8. Nativist failure to detect major clerical influence upon much of the 'secular' literature studied by them has been due above all to a tendency to acknowledge only the most obvious or superficial manifestations of this type and to discount the likelihood of a more profound or allusive use of scriptural and other ecclesiastical elements. Thus Mac Cana cautions "that the extant texts provide only a very incomplete index of a rich and complex oral tradition and that one should therefore be wary of too readily assuming borrowing on the part of the Irish monastic *literati* in those cases where items in native narrative can be matched by analogues in classical or ecclesiastical literature. By the very nature of the subject, absolute certainty in these matters is difficult to achieve, but the interests of sound methodology at the very least require that the analogous items be subjected to two checks before borrowing can reasonably be assumed and its extent adequately defined. The first is to determine, so far as is possible, whether the compared items occur in traditions other than Irish and classical/ecclesiastical, and if so, how extensively; the second, whether these items stand rootless and relatively isolated in Irish tradition or whether they mesh closely with the extant remains of the tradition, for, obviously, if they relate easily and incidentally to other themes and narratives in native literature the argument for borrowing becomes correspondingly less cogent" (1972, 141).

This approach is predicated on the unverifiable assumption that the bulk of so-called 'native literature' is rooted in an extensive oral tradition, and the onus is placed upon critics to offer indisputable proof that written ecclesiastical sources were involved in any given instance. This undertaking is, however, made as difficult as possible, since the hypothesis that the monastic authors of extant early Irish texts drew to any extent upon such demonstrably familiar sources as the Bible and related literature is apparently to be rejected if analogues can be found in other more remote traditions or if the features in question are at all widespread in or well integrated into the extant vernacular material. In effect, the central issue is thereby prejudged: there can have been no extensive or profound ecclesiastical influence upon these narratives because anything widely or deeply rooted there is regarded as by definition most unlikely to have emanated from the Church. Were one to ask why, the vicious circle would presumably be closed with reference to the fundamentally oral nature and origins of most vernacular literature recorded by monastic scribes.

In the article just cited Mac Cana discusses a tale in which Mongán mac Fíachna displays precocious wisdom as a youth and shows himself more knowledgeable than a prominent poet. This is compared with the boy Ambrosius' worsting of the king's *magi* in prophecy in Nennius' *Historia Brittonum*, a British Latin compilation of

obvious clerical provenance, the inference being "that insular Celtic oral tradition knew a version of the birth of the hero theme in which the wise wonder-child bested the druids of the king" (1972, 135). It is further claimed that "Indian tradition provides a particularly striking analogy" (ibid.) in the form of an elaborate and relatively late cosmogonic narrative revolving round the precocious wisdom of Vishnu, but "it is not so evident that the writer of the Ambrosius episode in the *Historia Brittonum* saw the parallel with the account of the child Jesus in the temple in Luke II, 41-52,; but, whether he did or not, the brief biblical story has not affected the Welsh narrative, which is quite independent and, as we have noted, is probably related collaterally to extant elements in the Mongán cycle" (ibid., 141-2).

Since, as Mac Cana rightly insists, certainty cannot be achieved in such matters, the only methodologically sound approach is to apply Ockham's razor and look for the most economical explanation compatible with the facts in any given instance. The question here is whether isolated attestations of a 'wonder-child' motif in two otherwise quite different literary narratives from Ireland and Wales justify the reconstruction of a common 'insular Celtic oral tradition' going a thousand or more years further back and whether vague similarities with a highly evolved Indian theological exposition point to an Indo-European prototype two or more millenia older still. These are large claims to base upon such flimsy evidence. Youthful precocity is an obvious and widely exploited means of foreshadowing a hero's future greatness the world over, and a far more detailed dossier of correspondences between these narratives would be required in order to make a genetic connection preferable to independent development as an explanation. Furthermore, since both the Mongán tale and the Nennius passage emanate from clerical pens, the young Jesus' remarkable display of erudition and insight in St. Luke's Gospel could surely have provided the impulse for both of these creations separately.

Moreover, it might reasonably be urged that inconclusive speculations about sources and origins should not be allowed to distract attention from the primary need to study the structure, contents and context of extant works with a view to establishing their contemporary import. It would have been surprising indeed if pioneers such as Zeuss and Thurneysen had chosen to concentrate upon the Celtic and Indo-European origins of various Old Irish forms while largely ignoring the language's actual grammatical system, and yet nativist scholarship has displayed just such a preoccupation in the field of early Irish literature and history. Once the perspective is shifted from archaic survivals to contemporary factors, it can be confidently asserted that medieval Irish *literati* were quite unaware of their Celtic and Indo-European roots, whereas the Bible and other Christian works played a central and indispensable role in monastic life and letters. Once it is conceded that monastic writers were capable of moulding their material creatively, it must be regarded as highly likely that ecclesiastical literature in general and the Bible in particular provided vital conceptual and narrative models capable of modifying inherited patterns where necessary or appropriate. At the very least, such scribes would have been very much alive to parallels from the Bible that they studied so intensively.

Telling arguments along these lines were advanced by Carney as long ago as 1955 with reference to some examples of saga and voyage literature, and recent studies by Ó Corráin, Breatnach and others are making the profound influence of the Bible and other clerical material upon the greatest of all nativist bastions, the Old Irish law tracts, increasingly apparent (cf. Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 1984;

Breatnach, 1984; Ó Corráin, 1987). As Walter Baetke's concise account of trends in the scholarly study of Norse sagas points out, a debate along these lines has already taken place with reference to a narrative literature generally held to have much in common with Irish sagas despite its rather later date. It may be helpful to quote some of his key statements in translation from the original German. Noting that "critical saga research begins with doubts about the reliability of the Icelandic sagas as historical documents" (1974, viii) around the middle of the ninteenth century, Baetke goes on to document the rise of various types of theory stressing the role of oral composition in their transmission but concludes that this approach has inevitably reached a dead end: "all in all it is true of the free-prose theory that it is less concerned with the sagas themselves than with their prehistory. The crux for this type of research resides in the fact that we are not acquainted with the oral tradition that is its object and are scarcely in a position to get through to it. Consequently it was and is impossible to get beyond speculations that will always remain doubtful. What we do know are the sagas that have come down to us in parchment and paper manuscripts. Only these can constitute an object of exact literary-historical investigation" (ibid., xi). Moreover, "because adherents of the book-prose theory basically break with the historical approach, they also have a different attitude to the tradition. They do not deny that there were oral traditions from the period of settlement and the following centuries and that part of these has issued into the sagas, but their main interest is in the written works" (ibid., xii-xiii). The latest stage has seen an increasing appreciation of the Christian and medieval western context of Icelandic saga literature: "there was little secular literature in Iceland at the beginning of the thirteenth century. As a result scholarly attention has recently been directed more intensively upon the ecclesiastical writings that constituted the greater part of the written literature at the time. Legends, saints' lives, homilies, Gregory's dialogues and other edifying and instructive works had already reached Iceland in the twelfth century and were translated in part. They cannot have failed to affect the authors of sagas, particularly since it can be confidently posited that not a few of these were clerics. At first sporadic discoveries revealed that the Icelandic sagas have adopted and adapted motifs from sermon illustrations, the 'Disciplina Clericalis' and other sources. More recent researches have unearthed in addition a mass of Christian concepts as well as illustrations of Christian morality and outlook on life, which lurk in them. These had previously been almost entirely overlooked because under the spell of the traditional theory people regarded these tales as documents from Iceland's pre-Christian period and looked for evidence of pagan religion and custom in them" (ibid., xvii-xviii). Surely there is a lesson here for students of the vast literary output of Irish monasteries in the early Middle Ages?

9. If so, it has been steadfastly ignored by nativists, who have countered threats to the 'purity' of early Irish tradition as transmitted in our texts by representing the authorial role of monastic writers in relation to key native genres as little more than scribal. The truly artistic cultivation and transmission of such material was, by contrast, supposedly the preserve of an independent, influential and highly organized learned class of poets or *filid* and judges or *brithemain* stubbornly clinging to inherited oral techniques and determined to resist all but the most superficial concessions to Christian imports. These in turn were seen as heirs of the pagan Celtic druid, whose continuation of an ancient Indo-European priestly function could be

asserted by comparing the Indian brahmans and Roman pontiffs. In this way an impressive human pipeline was created to channel the 'tradition' from its dim and distant Indo-European source through Celtic and Irish oral and pagan prehistory into early medieval Irish literature with a minimum of adulteration from foreign elements such as Christianity.

Dillon, for example, makes the following statement: "it was pointed out by Vendryes that India, Rome, and Celtic Gaul had one notable tradition in common, namely, the recognition of a privileged caste of priests, brahman, pontiff, and druid; and he so explained certain facts of vocabulary to which I shall return. If we examine more closely what is known of druidic practices in Gaul and what can be gleaned from Irish evidence, it appears that the brahman and the druid preserved more than a common ancient vocabulary: they preserved common Indo-European traditions of practice and belief, some of which survived in the Gaelic world down to the eighteenth century and have survived in India to the present day" (1947, 2). Mac Cana has claimed that "much of the traditional teaching and practice of the druids was maintained without interruption by the *filid*" (1971, 86) and in a recent lecture entitled '*Regnum* and *sacerdotium*' has gone so far as to identify a priestly dichotomy in early Christian Ireland between clerics and "a well-organized class of learned men, independent of the Church, who controlled and maintained the structures and ideology of native kingship. In the ninth century this class was known as the *filid*. They were a fellowship of learned poets, but, as the original literal meaning of their name, 'seers', indicates, they were very much more than that ... By the ninth century they were known as *filid*, but if . . . we could somehow translate ourselves to fourth- or fifth-century Ireland, we should probably find them identified primarily as druids" (1979, 445). Moreover, "the fact that the *sacerdotium* was shared by clerics and *filid* since the fifth century adds a complication to Church and State relations which is not paralleled in Europe. There are indeed those - or at least there have been those - who might quarrel with my applying the terms *sacerdos* to the druids, not to mention the *filid*, but this is surely little more than a pedantic quibble. If one accepts that the Indian brahman is a priest, and there are very few who do not, then I fail to see how one can describe the druid otherwise. It is true that as a result of what Dr Eleanor Knott has called 'the protective metamorphosis' of the *filid* the priestly functions which they inherited from the druids were very much attenuated, but so much still remains and so much of their peculiar status and influence is explicable only in terms of their pre-Christian role that they are best seen in the perspective of history as a residual priesthood" (ibid., 455). As "the mediator and the manipulator of the supernatural powers which affected the king and through him his kingdom" the chief poet's relationship with the 'sacral king' in early medieval Ireland earns him a comparison with India: "in the Vedic text *Āitareya Brāhmaṇa* (viii. 25) the king's priest, the *purohita*, who has so much else in common with the druid/*fili*, is referred to explicitly as *rāṣṭragopa* 'protector of the realm' because he preserves both the king and his kingdom by means of his spells and rites. In other words, both in India and in Ireland the king was the champion and benefactor of his people, but only so long as he himself was protected by the spiritual expertise of his priest" (ibid., 456). Being later arrivals on the scene, "the clergy were the Christian pendant to the (culturally) pagan *filid* and in many things seem to have adopted them as their model" (ibid., 478) and it is concluded "that the basic configuration of the relations between king and priest had already been

firmly established before the advent of Christianity and that it was never wholly superseded by subsequent change" (ibid., 479). So much so, indeed, that even the court poet of the post-Norman period can be considered "not merely as poet . . . but rather as residual priest and successor to the druids and to as much of their religious and ideological repertoire as survived the transition to Christianity" and "the correspondence here is between the Celtic *sacerdos* (poet/druid) and the Indian brahman and *purohita*" (Mac Cana, 1988, 84).

If only a significant fraction of these and other similar assertions were to be substantiated, it would be a moot point whether, despite a plethora of flourishing, influential and outward looking monasteries, early medieval Ireland could reasonably be termed a predominantly Christian country. Thus Mac Cana himself envisages merely skin-deep penetration "in a society which was now publicly Christian, but which was still strongly attached to traditional beliefs and practices, still had a rich and learned oral tradition running alongside the written vernacular tradition, and still betrayed a certain nostalgia for the less complicated life that existed before Christianity" (1986, 41-2), so much so that even the monastic *literati* supposedly drew "mainly on native tradition, as handed on by the lower orders of poets and storytellers" (ibid., 35). Richter too has boldly ventured where others had feared to tread by suggesting in a section of his book entitled 'Ireland - a Christian Country?' that "the most important evidence for the limited influence of Christianity in Ireland is the continued existence of the pre-Christian group of poets or seers (*filid*). It is difficult to say whether the *filid* and their culture should be regarded as being hostile to Christianity and in competition with it; or whether they were simply upholding among Christians a tradition untouched by Christianity . . . The continued existence of the *filid* and their further activity in the leading social classes shows that Christianity had a vigorous competitor in the cultural area" (1988, 65).

It seems strange indeed that the author of *Félire Óengusso*, writing close to 800 A.D., could have been so mistaken about the contemporary situation when he capped his famous contrast between Ireland's desolate royal forts and bustling monasteries with the following confidently triumphalist generalization: "the old cities of the pagans (*sen-chathraig na ngente*), concerning which prescriptive right has been effected, they are empty without worship like Lugaid's site. The small monastic sites that have been occupied by twos and threes, they are monastic Romes (*rúama*) with assemblies, with hundreds, with thousands. Paganism (*in gentlecht*) has been ruined, although it was illustrious and widespread. The kingdom of God the Father has filled heaven, earth and sea" (*Prol.*, 205-16).

As Patrick Sims-Williams points out in a fascinating recent article, the durable romantic myth of a 'Celtic twilight' was born shortly after the middle of the last century in France and England, where "Renan and Arnold were the first to present a wide European public with a synthetic, generalized picture of the various Celtic-speaking peoples and their literatures. Both were properly modest about their qualifications for the task; but their ignorance was an aid to generalization, and their picture of the Celts appealed at a more fundamental level than that of the niceties of scholarship. Their work, as René Galand, Malcolm Chapman, and others have shown, was founded upon a structural opposition between the Celts and the better-known European 'races'. Renan and Arnold set up the spiritual, impractical, rural, natural, and poetic Celtic peoples as the antithesis to materialism, 'Saxon'

philistinism, utilitarianism, excessive rationalism, artificiality, industrial urbanization, and all the other failings of the modern European world . . . If we are tempted to smile at the crudity of this racial myth, it may be salutary to recall the heady 1960s and the role then played by the Orient, particularly India and Nepal, in the thought-world of Western seekers after 'alternatives', in the days when 'far out' became a term of admiration. In both cases geography was an important part of the myth. The geographical position of the modern Celtic-speaking peoples, on the Western peripheries of Europe, was a historical explanation as well as a symbol for Renan, and all the more powerful for being both: . . . 'Never has a human family lived more apart from the world, and been purer from all alien admixture. Confined by conquest within forgotten islands and peninsulas, it has reared an impassable barrier against external influences; it has drawn all from itself; it has lived solely on its own capital . . . Roman civilization scarcely reached them, and left among them but few traces. The Teutonic invasion drove them back, but did not penetrate them. At the present hour they are still constant in resistance to an invasion dangerous in an altogether different way, – that of modern civilization'." (1986, 72-3).

10. The detailed picture of the interrelated activities of clerics, jurists, poets and the like to emerge from the early Irish sources themselves stands in marked contrast to the romantic nativist dualism illustrated above. Four categories of learned person seem to have chiefly interested the monastic compilers of annalistic obits in the pre-Norman period, namely the scholar in *ecnae* or scripturally based Latin learning, the *brithem* or jurist, the *senchaid* or genealogist-cum-historian, and the *fili* or poet-cum-storyteller. The legal tract *Uraicecht Becc* declares that many professions or *dánae* could be practised in either lay or monastic society without any change in the status or rewards due to them (*CIH* 1616.37f.), and notices in the annals duly bring monastic scholars, lawyers, historians and poets to light (cf. Ó Corráin, 1978, 14-6).

As the highest ranking practitioner of *ecnae* or *léigend* the *suí litre* or top Latin scholar, regularly termed *sapiens* in Hiberno-Latin and later called *fer léigind* in Irish, enjoyed status equal to that of a king, hospitaller, bishop or chief poet, this quintet of top-ranking equals being explicitly mentioned in the so-called 'genuine' prologue to the *Senchus Már* (*CIH* 348.24-349.25). During the two centuries following the obit of Cumméne Fota the *sapiens* in 662 A.D. the annals record the deaths of at least sixty one such top scholars in Latin and Scripture: thirty four are given a specific monastic affiliation and of these twenty one are described as holders of ecclesiastical positions, the high office of abbot in no less than eighteen cases. In a notice of a Viking attack upon Bangor in 823 (*AI*) particular mention is made of the community's scholars and bishops, *a suíd ⁊ a hepscoip*, being put to the sword, and the record of a similar attack upon Louth in 840 (*AU*) likewise singles out the bishops, priests and scholars taken prisoner: *episcopos ⁊ praespiteros ⁊ sapientes captivos duxerunt*. Of the sixteen jurists, termed *brithem* in Irish and *iudex* in Latin, that are awarded annalistic obituaries in the pre-Norman period, no less than eleven are explicitly affiliated to monasteries, nine as holders of high ecclesiastical office, usually that of abbot or *airchinnech*. The profession of *senchaid* or historian rates twenty obits from the eighth to the twelfth century, fourteen with declared monastic affiliations including the odd abbot, *airchinnech* or the like. Of the fifty or so *filid* or poets mentioned in the annals of the pre-Norman period, nine are explicitly attached to monasteries (McCone, 1986b, 12). It must be stressed that absence of a

stated monastic affiliation in this material by no means demonstrates on its own that the individual concerned was not so connected. For example, it can be confidently assumed that most, if not all, of the scholars of Latin and Scripture appearing in the annals held monastic positions, although this is only specified in just over half of the obits in question. The very name of the "Augustin Úa Cuinn, chief judge of the Leinstermen" who died in 1095 according to *AFM*, surely indicates a cleric, and the monastic connections of "Máel Mura, chief poet of Ireland (*ríg-fili Érenn*)" (obit *AU* 887) and the "most excellent poet (*poeta optimus*)" Ruman mac Colmáin (obit *AU* 747) will be considered later.

In his recent edition of *Uraicecht na Ríar* Liam Breatnach quotes the following highly illuminating passage from a short Middle Irish legal tract on the ecclesiastical grades: "as for the bishop of Armagh, he has twenty one *cumal*'s, and furthermore his man of ecclesiastical learning and his chief judge and poet (*a fer légind ⁊ a ollam bretheman ⁊ filed*) have the same honour-price as him; and it is thus even for every man of ecclesiastical learning and poet and judge of every other monastery (*do cach fir légind ⁊ filid ⁊ brethema[i]n cacha cathrach remuind*), he has the same honour-price as his bishop" (1987, 91). This is, of course, a clear indication that any monastery of note was expected to have its own leading Latin scholar, professor of *filedacht* and chief judge, and it would be surprising if such pinnacles of their professions were not accompanied by various subordinate grades and pupils, thus constituting monastic schools.

The death of Cenn Fáelad, the *sapiens* or head of a monastic Latin school, in 679 A.D. is recorded in a presumably trustworthy *AU* obit, and a profound interest in the Church and her learning is displayed by a couple of arcane poetic compositions in Old Irish ascribed to him in the legal tracts *Míadslechta* and *Bretha Nemed* (*CIH* 586.14-5 and 2212.3f.), which were hardly compiled more than about half a century after his death. Clearly the tradition that he combined the disciplines of the Latin scholar, the poet and the jurist can be traced much further back than the extant Middle Irish versions of the well known and much discussed story of the destruction of his 'brain of forgetfulness' in the Battle of Mag Raith in 637 A.D. (e.g. *CIH* 250.33f.). According to this Cenn Fáelad was taken for convalescence to Bricín's establishment of Túaim Drecain, where there were three schools for Latin learning, native law and poets respectively (*scol léigind ⁊ scol fénechais ⁊ scol filed*), the teachings of which Cenn Fáelad is supposed to have memorized by day and written up at night in poetic form. Failure to recognise that Túaim Drecain was a monastery (cf. Gwynn and Hadcock, 1970, 407: Tomregan) led Mac Neill (1911) and consequently Mac Cana to posit secular schools of law and poetry here as well as a unique honorific and non-monastic application of the designation *sapiens* to what Mac Cana terms a "cultivated man of the world as Cenn Fáelad is reputed to have been" (1970, 71), while Richter ignores the text itself and fantasizes that "a doctor from the school of the druids operated on him" (1988, 85). Túaim Drecain's obscurity is such that the location of Cenn Fáelad's epoch-making endeavours there instead of in a greater monastery has the ring of historical truth detected by Mac Neill rather than being the mere idealized fiction envisaged by Mac Cana. For present purposes, however, this hardly matters. Whatever the proportion of fact and fiction in this narrative, it was clearly intended as the charter for a literate monastic legal tradition applied to society as a whole and believed to combine poetic teaching and practice with ecclesiastical doctrine and techniques. It is, in fact, an aetiology of the state of

affairs described by *Uraicecht Becc*: "truth is based upon maxims and precedents and true scriptural testimonies (*for roscadaib ⁊ fásaigib ⁊ teistemnaib fíraib*) . . . Any judgement of a cleric that exists is based on the truth and entitlement of Scripture. A poet's judgement, however, is based on maxims. A ruler's judgement, however, is based on them all, on maxims and precedents and scriptural testimonies".

The story about Cenn Fáelad is thus likely to involve the projection of relevant contemporary conditions into the more distant past for authoritative justification, and this suggests that alongside the central *scol léigind* schools of law and *filedacht* or *senchus* were a common enough feature in pre-Norman Irish monasteries. The annalistic evidence just considered is corroborated by the Old Irish Triads, which single out five different monasteries as the main centres in Ireland for Latin learning, history and three branches of native law: Ross Carberry for *léigend*, Emly for *senchus*, Cloyne for *féinechas*, Cork for *bérla Féine* and Slane for *brethemnas* (Meyer, 1906, nos. 17, 15, 12, 16, 21).

11. Far from describing their learning and its transmission in the dualistic terms so beloved of modern nativists, early medieval Irish writers tend to view it as a seamless garment, so to speak. Thus the boundaries between Latin learning and jurisprudence, poetry and history are blurred, to say the least, in the relevant accounts and there is evidence for a great deal of overlap both in theory and in practice.

To begin with, expertise in two or more of these interdependent fields is sometimes ascribed to monastic types in annalistic obits, as when the Annals of Ulster record the deaths of "Ailill mac Cormaic, abbot of Slane, Latin scholar and most excellent judge (*sapiens et iudex optimus*)" in 802, of "Cú Roí mac Aldniad, abbot of Inis Clothrann and Fochlaid Midi, Latin scholar and most expert in Irish histories (*sapiens et peritissimus historiarum Scotticarum*)" in 871, of "Eochaid Úa Flannacáin, erenagh of Lis Oíged and Clúain Fíachna, master of poetry and history (*suí filidechta ⁊ senchusa*)" in 1004, and of "Flann Mainistrech, chief Latin scholar and professor of Irish history (*ardfer léigind ⁊ suí senchusa Érenn*)" in 1056. Indeed, the Annals of Tigernach are still more generous to Flann, calling him "expert of the Gael in Latin learning and history and poetry and versification (*etir léigend ⁊ senchus ⁊ filidecht ⁊ airchetal*)". The earliest historically reliable obits of poets in *AU* are "Ruman mac Colmáin, most excellent poet (*poeta optimus*)" in 747 and "Máel Mura, chief poet of Ireland (*rígfili Érenn*)" in 887. The latter can be identified as the famous Máel Mura Othna and accordingly connected with the monastery of Othain and its patron Mura. He is also called a *senchaid* or historian in a poem appended to his obit, and is accredited in the Book of Leinster with authorship of the pseudohistorical poem entitled *Can a mbunadus na nGáedel?*, 'Whence the origin of the Gael?' (*LL* 15990f.), probably the earliest extant Irish version of the biblically inspired account of the wanderings of Gáedel Glas and his descendants from Pharoah's Egypt to their promised land of Ireland. The admittedly late but often well informed Annals of the Four Masters (742; O'Donovan, 1854) describe Ruman more fully as "an expert in Latin learning, in chronology and in poetry (*saoi in eccna i ccroinic ⁊ i filidhecht*)" and saints' genealogies recently edited by Pádraig Ó Riain describe him as the father of two bishops, ancestor of the Síl Rumain in Trim, one of the three greatest poets in the world beside Homer and Vergil, and brother of Cormac or Colmán "bishop in Trim" (cf. Byrne, 1984, xvii-xix; Ó Riain,

1985, 126 and 177). Neither of these gentlemen, to say nothing of Eochaid Ua Flannacáin, Flann Mainistrech and their ilk, give grounds for belief in the so-called '(culturally) pagan *filid*' of pre-Norman Ireland.

Even more significant than such individual examples of the incorporation of the *fili* and his profession into the ecclesiastical network are more general assertions of the Church's input into and control over the mainstream of early medieval Irish culture. A powerful symbol of this was the tradition that the great legal compilation called *Senchus Már* was the joint work of a commission of three bishops, three kings and three poets or judges under St. Patrick's leadership, while Patrick's seventh-century biographer Muirchú deliberately singles out from the generally hostile druids and other members of the *áes dáno* a judge, Erc of Slane, and a poet, Dubthach maccu Lugair with his pupil Fíacc of Sletty, to submit willingly to the apostle's authority and accept Christianity before it was, so to speak, either profitable or popular to do so (see ch. 4, 3). The close relationship between the seven grades of the Church and the seven grades of *filid* has been demonstrated by Breatnach (1987, 81-9), and it is noteworthy that poet and priest alike were forbidden to have more than one spouse in a society otherwise characterized by a marked preference for polygamy, which monastic jurists justified with reference to the Old Testament. Tomás Ó Cathasaigh (1986) has recently drawn attention to the functional equivalence of saint's curse and poet's satire, and the logical conclusion of this longstanding symbiosis was the freeing of clerics and *filid* from secular courts at the Synod of Cashel in 1101 (Gwynn, 1968, 15). The 'pseudohistorical' prologue to the *Senchus Már* claims that "until Patrick came, then, pronouncement used to be granted to a trio only in Ireland, the historian (*fer comgne*) for narration and storytelling, the poet (*fer cerda*) for praising and satirizing, the judge (*breithem*) for judgement according to maxims and precedents. Since Patrick came, however, each of these pronouncements is subject to the man of the white language, i.e. of Scripture (*do fiur in bérla báin, .i. ina canóine*)" (*CIH* 342.22-5). Beryl Smalley points out that in Western Europe "the Bible was the most studied book of the middle ages. Bible study represented the highest branch of learning . . . Such knowledge was not confined to the specialist: both the language and the content of Scripture permeate medieval thought" (1952, xi). That early Christian Ireland was no exception emerges clearly from the following statement in *Míadslechta*: "so that it is identically that the grades of scriptural Latin learning and the Church (*gráda ecna ⁊ ecalsa*) correspond reciprocally to the grades of poets and landowners (*gráda file[d] ⁊ féne*), but scriptural Latin learning (*ecna*) is the mother of each of these professions so that it is out of her palm that they all drink" (*CIH* 586.27-9).

The wealth, manpower and political importance of major Irish monasteries from at least the seventh century emerge clearly and repeatedly from contemporary legal, hagiographical and other sources. This ties in with the fact that early Christian Ireland had a reasonably typical medieval western European social structure in which Church and State were inextricably linked, a typical statement to this effect being provided by the Old Irish law tract *Córus Béscnai*: "everything which did not contradict either the word of God in the Law of the letter or the conscience of Christians was sewn together into the order of judges by the Church and poets (*filid*). All the law of nature was proper, allowing for (the claims of) faith and its propriety, and (there was) sewing together of Church and State (*comúaim n-ecalsa fri túaith*) and the due of both from each other and to each other. For there are claims of

Church upon State and claims of State upon Church. The claims of State upon Church, when it is in its propriety and fair entitlement, (are) the request for rights from the Church, namely baptism, communion, hymns for the soul, mass from every church to everyone according to his proper faith with exposition of the word of God to everyone who should listen to it and fulfil it . . . The entitlement of Church from State: tithes and first-fruits and firstlings (are) the claim of the Church from its members" (*CIH* 529.1f.). The cultural implications of this interdependence are clearly expressed by the following passage from an early tract on poets: "a kingdom (*túath*) shall not be a kingdom without scholar (*ecna*), without cleric (*eclais*), without poet (*fili*), without king (*rí*) who extends contract and treaty for kingdoms. A scholar shall not be a scholar, whom Scripture does not guide aright. A cleric shall not be a cleric without mass. A king shall not be a king without substance. A poet shall not be poet without composition (*fuirmed* 'setting down') if he be of proper foundation, of the offspring of a poet. They are entitled to reward from kings and nobles who are at the head of a kingdom" (Gwynn, 1940, 31.10-7). Unambiguous statements of this kind in "law tracts of the eighth century" that allegedly "only take passing notice of the Christianization of society" (Richter, 1988, 60) surely give the lie to the statement that "an established Church of the kind that had influenced the shaping of Christianity in the Empire since the fourth century did not, therefore, have an equivalent in Ireland" (ibid.).

This and other passages represent kings and aristocrats as important patrons of the *filid*, who could obviously ply their craft either in the monasteries or among the laity in the normal fashion. The crucial question is where the class as a whole received its education, what kind of curriculum was involved and how this was related to that of other disciplines like law, history and Latin learning. Evidence has already been advanced to demonstrate the existence of schools of *ecnae* or *léigend*, of branches of law such as *brithemnas*, *féinechas* and *bélrae féne*, of *senchus* and of *filedacht* in the early Irish monasteries. The existence of secular counterparts in the pre-Norman period remains to be proved but, even if there were such schools also, the monastic provenance of the literary output in each of these fields is hardly open to doubt. Moreover, an examination of the qualifications expected in the upper reaches of these disciplines points to something like a monastic core curriculum in which they were all rooted. Thus the third highest ranking ecclesiastical scholar in *Míadslechta* was expected to be competent in poetry (*filidecht*) and history (*comgne*) as well as Latin learning (*léigend*), and Breatnach (1986, 46-7) has recently made a very strong case for identifying the Banbán responsible for writing the vernacular legal tract *Cáin Fuithirbe* around 680 A.D. with the *sapiens/scriba/fer léigind* (of Kildare?) of that name whose death in 686 A.D. is recorded in various annals and who is probably the same as the Banbannus mentioned in the seventh-century Hiberno-Latin commentary on the Catholic Epistles. Conversely the eighth- or ninth-century *Uraicecht Becc* insists upon the indispensability of poetry and Latin learning as qualifications of the highest ranking judge, the *brithem teora mbreth .i. breth féni ⁊ breth filed ⁊ breth bérla báin bias* "the judge of three judgements, namely a judgement of the *Féni*, a judgement of poets and a judgement of white language that shall be", glossed as native law (*fénechas*), poetry (*filidecht*) and Latin learning (*léigend*) respectively (*CIH* 1612.23-6, cf. 1614.32-3).

Uraicecht na Ríar demands of the *ollam* or chief poet knowledge of three hundred and fifty tales, of history (*coimgne*) and of judgement by native law (*brithemnacht*

fénechais). The first two of these recur in the preface to saga list A, while list B is introduced by a passage in which Urard mac Coise, functioning as the typical *fili*, boasts a knowledge of histories (*coimgneda*), tales (*sceóil*), items of ancient lore (*senchusa*) and the takings of Ireland (*gabála Érenn*) (ed. Mac Cana, 1980, 50). This representation of a poet fully versed in the biblically inspired scheme of invasions chimes in well with the already discussed poem on the origins of the Gael ascribed to the ninth-century *fili* Máel Mura but is less easy to square with Mac Cana's unsubstantiated claim that "until approximately the end of the eleventh century the monastic scholar was distinguished from his *fili* counterpart by his study and promotion of the 'synthetic' history which reached its fullest development in the twelfth-century compilation of *Lebor Gabála*, 'the Book of Conquest'" (1974, 138).

12. Nativist assumptions about the pre-Norman *filid* are all too often based upon the evidence and practices of post-Norman bardic poets or, worse still, upon "the most detailed description of these schools" (Richter, 1988, 183) provided in the 1722 Memoir of the Marquis of Clanricarde by Thomas O'Sullevane, who not only wrote after they had ceased to exist but is now also seriously suspected of having been a fraud and a forger of earlier records (Ó Murchadha, 1983). However, it cannot be safely assumed that the post-Norman poets represent a straightforward continuation of the attitudes and practices of the pre-Norman *filid*, particularly when there is evidence for hostility between poets and churchmen "at least as early as the fourteenth century" (Williams, 1980, 341) but nothing comparable in the pre-Norman period.

It is no surprise that these later poets only occasionally call themselves *bard* and generally prefer the more prestigious title of *file*, but the name used in the annals of the period is, as my wife Katharine Simms informs me, almost invariably *fer dána*. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries are generally recognised as a watershed in which the success of newly established continental monastic orders forced the vernacular learning of the older monasteries into an increasingly secular milieu, and it looks as if the earlier rigid distinctions between the monastically oriented *fili* and the humbler secular *bard* gradually disappeared around that time to bring into being a merged class of *fir dhána* with a major input of previously bardic personnel and practices. Gerard Murphy's (1940, 206) surmise about the 'underground' existence of bardic panegyric in pre-Norman Ireland is corroborated by an actual reference to oral composition in the Old Irish tract on poets in *Ériu* 13: "although knowledge of letters and metrics is not required of the bards, it is required of them to perceive and recognise their proper measure by ear and nature. It is thus that the free bards make their bardic poetry" (Gwynn, 1940, 43-4). Another text states clearly that the study of letters, metrics and inflections set the *fili* apart from the humbler *bard* (Thurneysen, 1891, 6) and that the poet's long course of study included grammar, numerous ogams and texts such as *Bretha Nemed* and *Auraicept na hÉicsine* (ibid., 32,36). The latter was also known as *Auraicept na nÉces* 'The Poets' Primer' and has been aptly described by Mac Cana as "a fairly typical product of Latino-Gaelic learning" (1974, 136). In the likely event that the authors of these poetic texts were *filid*, their occasional use of Latin evinces a familiarity with that language born of a monastic education. If, on the other hand, they were ecclesiastical scholars rather than *filid* proper, their very subject matter proves a deep monastic interest in and acquaintance with the education and usages of poets. Most likely, of course, they

were both. Nevertheless, some scholars have sought to distinguish between "monastic *literati* or *nua-litridi*" and "the learned *filid*" (so Mac Cana, 1971, 117, cf. 106) on the strength of a single passage (Thurneysen, 1891, 23) describing bardic metres also used by *filid* in addition to their own peculiar measures as *núachrotha* or 'new forms' because "it is *núalitridi* who discovered them". However, the other two attestations in the St. Gall glosses (5^{b}11, 90^{b}4) on Priscian make it quite clear that *núalitridi* simply meant 'recent authors' as opposed to older writers and so implies no contrast with allegedly oral *filid*.

It seems, then, that literacy was an indispensable attribute of the medieval Irish *filid*, and it should be emphasised that the attested requirement that *filid* be able to recite memorized poems and tales to aristocratic audiences is quite irrelevant to the question of oral versus written composition. There is no good evidence for the loose claim, apparently based upon a well worn passage from the Clanricarde Memoir mentioned above, that in early Christian Ireland "the recitations of genealogies and prescribed stories were learned in darkened rooms" (Richter, 1988, 20). As Oskamp has remarked, "the *fili* of this period is in no way comparable with the *scéalaighe*, the storyteller by the fireside. He is the scholar-layman who is educated in a monastery and fulfils a high position either in a royal court or in a monastic school" (1970, 14). The notion of a clear divide between ecclesiastical scholars on the one hand and high-ranking categories of the so-called 'secular' *áes dáno* such as poets or judges on the other is central to the illusion of a 'native tradition' hermetically, not to say cryogenically, sealed by its practitioners from suspicious foreign elements and innovations imported by the Church, but this purist view is untenable for the simple reason that it is seriously at variance with the evidence of the contemporary texts themselves.

This was already apparent to Rudolf Thurneysen over sixty years ago, when he observed that "very soon after the introduction of Christianity these *filid* entered into a close connection with monastic learning" (1921, 66-7) and that "the first written copies hardly came about through a monastic denizen asking a *fili* for his tales, but we should rather assume that some *filid* acquired the art of reading and writing and themselves wrote down what seemed worthy of recollection to them and presumably also their own compositions" (ibid., 72). Although mostly dismissed as uncongenial by the majority of the postwar generation of Irish scholars, this approach has recently been taken up, further developed and corroborated by Ó Corráin: "one fundamentally important point must be kept in mind in dealing with all Irish literary, legal and historical materials: they are the products of a highly trained, highly self-aware mandarin class. One must note that the worlds of native and ecclesiastical learning had merged long before the bulk of the surviving texts were redacted – a matter which is of very considerable consequence" (1986, 142). Indeed it is, and the following chapters should help to highlight various aspects of a situation radically different from that depicted by the nativist school.

CHAPTER TWO

Literary genre and narrative techniques

1. Robert Alter has recently remarked of the Old Testament that "the generic variety of this anthology is altogether remarkable, encompassing as it does historiography, fictional narratives, and much that is a mixture of the two, lists of laws, prophecy in both poetry and prose, aphoristic and reflective works, cultic and devotional poems, laments and victory hymns, love poems, genealogical tables, etiological tales, and much more" (Alter and Kermode, 1987, 12). A casual comparison of this list with the one at the beginning of the first chapter indicates considerable generic affinities between the corpus of early medieval Irish literature and the contents of the Bible. Regardless of how they arose, these and more detailed similarities to be discussed later can hardly have escaped the attention of early Irish monastic writers whose public worship and private study revolved around Scripture.

Inevitable doubts about the precise biblical text involved in many individual instances will rarely be of much moment in what follows. That being so, practical considerations, the apparent availability of Jerome's version in Ireland as early as the sixth century (cf. Loewe in Lampe, 1975, 132-3) and the early eighth-century Irish Canons' habit of quoting it (*Can. Hib.*, xv) make the Vulgate the obvious text upon which to base scriptural citations and comparisons in the present work. English translations have generally been kept as close to the Authorised Version as the Vulgate wording would allow.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, certain types of early Irish literature, notably many 'secular' sagas, are commonly regarded as virtually direct, if often clumsy, records of oral originals with a thoroughly pagan ethos, the implication being that the monastic men of letters responsible for their preservation deliberately, but not entirely successfully, sought to stifle inevitable moral disapproval of some or most of their contents in the interests of antiquarian objectivity coupled with touching romanticism. Such anachronistic altruism is a highly improbable and, given the biblical dimension, unnecessary postulate. The sweeping Old Testament narrative from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Kings, from creation to captivity, is full of gruesome and apparently unedifying happenings by any standards, but this has not prevented its assiduous cultivation by Christian seekers after deeper meanings. Tales of greed, disobedience, deceit, fratricide, incest, rape, plunder, slaughter and so forth have all been made to yield their moral message, and there

is no reason why a monastic scholar thoroughly familiar, unlike many a modern critic, with this savagely sacred material should have had any ethical or aesthetic qualms about the more ferocious and forthright features of 'native' saga and related genres.

To take a trivial enough case, the early Irish heroes' notorious habit of decapitating enemies and then keeping their heads, calcified brains or tongues as trophies for display at dinner and other gatherings almost certainly continues pagan Celtic usage as described by various classical authors (McCone, 1983, 31-2). However, the medieval Irish cannot have been affected by this consideration since they were quite unaware of their Celtic antecedents (Byrne, 1974, 144), and mere conservative inertia hardly accounts for the vigorous survival and propagation of this motif in monastic literature. Evidence that the decapitation of enemies continued to be practised in early Christian Ireland seems more to the point (McCone, 1983, 33), and there was little reason for clerics and their literary associates to be squeamish about this when, for instance, the regal paragon David had deliberately severed Goliath's head for display (1 Sam./Kgs. 17:51f.). Moreover, David presented his prospective father-in-law Saul with a bride-price of two hundred Philistine foreskins, double the number asked for (ibid. 18:25f.), while the zealous Jehu had Ahab's seventy sons murdered and their severed heads put on public show (2/4 Kgs. 10:6f.). The beheading of enemies for display would hardly, then, have struck a medieval Irish churchman as an intrinsically pagan or, as he would have put it, 'gentile' practice.

2. It has long been realized that the early history of Ireland as recounted in sources going back at least as far as the seventh and eighth centuries (Luccraid's laconic accentual poem tracing the Éoganacht genealogy back from Cú-cen-máthair in *Corp. Gen.* 199-202; a similar Leinster genealogical poem at *Corp. Gen.* 6; Nennius 13-5) fits squarely into a narrative framework derived from the central events of Genesis and Exodus (e.g. Macalister, 1938, xxvii-viii). This will be discussed in the next chapter, where it will further be argued that certain key features of the last two traditional invasions of Ireland, by the Túatha Dé Danann and sons of Míl respectively, mirror basic situations in the biblical books of Joshua and Judges. Early Christian Ireland's vast genealogical record was, of course, anchored in this scheme of invasions and through it connected to elaborate biblical genealogies such as 1 Chronicles 1-8 going back to Noah and Adam (Ó Corráin, 1985, 67-8). A comparison between this or other Old Testament genealogies and medieval Irish family trees like that of the Éoganacht in Rawl. B. 502 (*Corp. Gen.* 195-7) reveals similar political preoccupations (cf. Byrne, 1974, 144-5), the occasional insertion of brief narratives at appropriate points, and a common descending arrangement, following one branch down before returning to the main stock to pick up a collateral one and steadily narrowing the focus to the group or groups of greatest interest to the compiler. In the medieval Irish genealogies this approach alternates with the more straightforward reverse procedure of tracing a given individual's pedigree back by a simple 'A son of B son of C son of D etc.' formula (e.g. *Corp. Gen.* 197-9) comparable with Christ's ascending lineage in Luke 3:23-38. Another shared feature is a kind of testament whereby a father assigns their various destinies to his sons and their descendants: the best known biblical example is Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49, while the elaborate *Timna Chathaír Máir* (Dillon, 1962, 148f.) or the more succinct

Timna Néill (*Corp. Gen.* 131-2) are obvious Irish parallels. Indeed, detailed biblical echoes in the former have been pointed out by Ó Corráin (1985, 54). The political dimension of genealogy will figure prominently in chapter ten and is sufficiently commonplace (Vansina, 1973, 153-4) to make independent convergence a reasonable explanation for some of the above agreements, although their cumulative evidence probably points to significant biblical influence. However that may be, it can be confidently asserted that the monastic compilers of extant early Irish genealogical material would have been fully aware of these resonances with the Bible.

Thanks to the pioneering work of Ó Corráin and others, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Bible, particularly the legal sections of the Pentateuch, exercised a major influence upon both the theoretical framework and the actual contents of even the earliest Irish law tracts, whether canon or secular, in Latin or the vernacular. These important insights will be discussed more fully in chapter four and do not, of course, preclude significant pre-Christian elements. That said, it is indisputable that Old Irish law was consciously linked with that of the Old Testament, even to the extent of asserting tha. pre-Christian Irish law was fundamentally Mosaic and had been learned from the horse's mouth, so to speak, by Fénius Farsaid's (see 4 below) pupil Caí Caínbrethach ('fair-judging'), who subsequently came to Ireland with the sons of Míl (Ó Corráin, 1987, 288-94).

Early Irish gnomic tracts such as the *Audacht Morainn* (Kelly, 1976) and *Tecosca Cormaic* have obvious affinities with Old Testament wisdom literature as represented by Proverbs, Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus above all. A pointed style based upon a constant and varied interplay between parallelism and antithesis, formulaic repetition and variation, is noticeable in both literatures, but such features seem to be almost inevitable in an aphoristic genre and the Irish examples fall short of, say, Proverbs' frequent stylistic intricacy. Since, moreover, similarities in content are not unduly striking overall, a concern with early medieval Irish *mores* appears to have outweighed slavish imitation of the Bible in the constitution and development of an Irish genre that nonetheless contains obvious Christian elements (ch. 5, 12). Regardless of whether an originally pagan form has been assimilated to Christianity or biblical and patristic models have been rather freely adapted to Irish conditions, there can be little doubt that monastic *literati* drew pertinent parallels between their own gnomic literature and that of the Bible. It is, for instance, hardly a coincidence that *Tecosca Cormaic*, which is cast in a question and answer form probably derived from the monastic schoolroom (Charles-Edwards and Kelly, 1983, 25), represents the illustrious king of Tara and Ireland, Cormac mac Airt, giving sectionalised practical and moral instructions to his son just as the great king of Jerusalem and Israel, Solomon, is envisaged addressing various chapters (2, 3, 5, 6 etc.) of his Proverbs to his son. A particular branch of early Irish aphoristic literature is represented by substantial compilations of Triads and Heptads. Plausible biblical models can be found here and there in the wisdom literature, for instance the heptad in Proverbs 6:16-19 and the triads in Ecclesiasticus 25:1-2 (cf. Prov. 25:3 and 26:3 and the series of 'triads' expanded to tetrads in 30:18-31), but the genre certainly developed a momentum of its own in early Christian Ireland.

The prominence of kings in early Irish sagas is obviously first and foremost a native feature reflecting the central role of monarchy in pre-Norman Irish society and politics, but the fact remains that this and other ingredients were almost bound

to remind medieval writers steeped in the Bible of the gripping narrative in 1-4 Kings (in the Septuagint and Vulgate, but 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings in the Hebrew Bible, English Authorized Version etc.). For instance, the constant conflict in the so-called 'Ulster Cycle' between the Ulidian kingdom with its capital at Emain Machae and the other provinces of Ireland led by the monarchs of Crúachu in Connacht was eminently compatible with the recurrent hostilities between the kings of Judah and those of the tribally more diverse Israel after the division of the kingdom between Reheboam and Jereboam in 1/3 Kings, 12.

3. Moreover, Irish monastic saga-writers were presumably as prone as their Norse counterparts (see ch. 1, 8) to adapt biblical and other Christian elements to their narratives. This possibility will be further explored below and in subsequent chapters, and a single example must suffice here. In literary descriptions of the *bruidnea* or hostels of certain idealized mythical representatives of the socially important early Irish class of *briugaid* or hospitallers emphasis is laid upon the dispensation of food to all visitors from cauldrons in which meat was boiled (McCone, 1984c, 2-7). Thus the first section of *Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó* states of such an establishment: "the man who went along the road used to put the fork into the cauldron and, whatever he brought up from the first thrust, that is what he would eat. If, however, he did not bring up anything from the first visit, he would not get another". Since this theme of quite literal pot-luck is scarcely consonant with the Old Irish laws' meticulous detailing of the type and amounts of food due to guests in strict accordance with their status, it comes as little surprise that later versions of this motif should attempt to resolve the anomaly. Thus the Middle Irish *Scél na Fír Flatha* (par. 10) gives king Cormac a magic cauldron of this type capable of awarding different cuts of meat to the thrusters according to the niceties of rank, and this modification presumably underlies the rule in the saga *Bruiden Da Choca* (par. 31) that "just one thrust of his fork used to be given to each person, and there only comes his proper food out of that". At all events there is a strong *prima facie* case for an external origin of what looks like the original version in *Scéla Muicce*, and 1 Sam./Kgs. 2:13-4 duly tells of the custom that "whoever had sacrificed a victim, the priest's servant used to come while the pieces of meat were being boiled, and he used to have a three-pronged fork in his hand, and he used to put it into the cauldron or vessel or pot or kettle, and everything that the fork brought up the priest used to take for himself". The similarities here are such that the obvious explanation is a direct borrowing from the Bible with such minor adaptations as the new context demanded.

The function of this motif may be largely ornamental, but more could well be involved in view of the New Testament's evident penchant for references to the Old in order to shape essential typological messages. As Lampe puts it, "at almost every point the evangelists, often by means of subtle hints and allusions, convey their belief that what God had accomplished in Christ was analogous to his great acts recorded in the Scriptures" (1975, 157). Moreover, David Howlett has now demonstrated that at the very dawn of Irish letters St. Patrick made highly effective use of just such a technique of significant biblical allusion in his extant writings (1989). Accordingly, if the interpretation of *Scéla Muicce* as a moral satire offered below (see ch. 3, 11) is valid, the introductory scriptural allusion could well be a deliberate cue evoking the apposite biblical frame narrative concerning the gross misconduct of

Eli's sons and its dire consequences. Be that as it may, there are undoubted cases where the recognition of biblical allusions and their context is crucial to the overall significance of a narrative episode. It has long been realized that early Irish saga and hagiography, whether in Latin or the vernacular, have much in common, and Muirchú's seventh-century Life of Patrick in Latin is a good early example of what might be termed "saintly epic in the Irish mode" (McCone, 1984b, 33-8). Scriptural quotation and reference play a major and hitherto insufficiently appreciated role in Muirchú's narrative, and a brief discussion here should help to identify factors of potential relevance to topics dealt with in later chapters.

The great set piece in Muirchú I 16-21 (Bieler, 1979) bringing Patrick and his small band of followers into conflict with and ultimate triumph over the Irish establishment under the king of Tara, Lóegaire mac Néill, revolves round a great pagan feast explicitly likened (15, 2) to that given by king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in chapter three of Daniel. Although there is nothing approaching slavish imitation, there are some evidently deliberate verbal echoes of the book of Daniel. For instance, the functionaries assembled (*congregati*: Muir. I 15, 2, Dan. 3:3) comprise kings (Muir. *reges*, Dan. *tyranni*), satraps, chiefs, nobles and princes (*satrapae, duces, optimates, principes*) in both, although the pagan monarch's "magistrates and judges" (*magistratus et iudices*) are significantly omitted by Muirchú lest this detract from his deliberate depiction of a representative of this class as an early convert to Christianity (see ch. 1, 11). Muirchú's three main categories of stubbornly pagan *áes dáno* are termed *magi, incantatores* and *aruspices* in conformity with Daniel 5:11 (cf. 2:27 etc.), and his subjects' salutation to Lóegaire, *rex in aeternum vive* "king, live forever" (Muir. I 15, 5), is identical to that applied to oriental potentates in Daniel (3:9, 5:10, 6:6, 6:21). Nebuchadnezzar's great feast provides the setting for the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to worship the golden statue, the king's attempt to kill them in the fiery furnace and their miraculous escape with God's help. Later in the book a similar sequence of events occurs when Daniel's insistence upon worshipping God in defiance of king Darius' edict leads to his being cast into the lions' den, miraculous rescue from which brings about the king's conversion (Dan. 6). Patrick likewise defies the king's pagan rite by celebrating Easter (Muir. I 15, 3-6), escapes an attempt upon his life through miraculous divine intervention (18, 6-8) and finally converts the monarch (21). These biblical resonances help to endow Tara with an opulent imperial atmosphere highly congenial to Muirchú's political concerns (I 10, 1, cf. McCone, 1982, 137), while simultaneously highlighting the struggle against entrenched paganism and the ability of a faithful few to triumph against huge odds with God's support.

However, Lóegaire is also likened by Muirchú to a more insidious New Testament sovereign. After his druids' (*magi*) warnings about the threat posed by Patrick and the new religion *his ergo auditis turbatus est rex Loiguire valde ut olim Erodis et omnis civitas Temoria cum eo* "having heard these things, then, king Lóegaire was exceedingly disturbed, like Herod once, and all the city of Tara with him" (I 16, 1). This is an explicit echo of king Herod's reaction to the enquiries of the three *magi* in Matthew 2:3: *audiens autem Herodes rex turbatus est et omnis Hierosolyma cum illo*. Thus Tara is now equated allusively with Jerusalem, and the comparison with Herod introduces Lóegaire's deceitful side, feigning submission to Patrick while really intending to kill him. After Daniel had expounded his dream Nebuchadnezzar fell down and adored him (Dan. 2:46, *tunc rex Nabuchodonosor cecidit in faciem*

suam et Danihelum adoravit) but a similar action by Lóegaire after divine intervention to thwart his first effort to kill Patrick is mere pretence (Muir. I 18, 1-6: *et venit rex timore coactus et flexit genua coram sancto et finxit adorare quem nolebat*), just like Herod's expressed wish to adore Christ (Matth. 2:8: *ut et ego veniens adorem eum*). Like the holy family, Patrick and his followers are forthwith enabled by God to avoid the king's unwelcome attentions.

The wider implications of these analogies between Tara and Jerusalem, Lóegaire and Herod, Patrick and Christ (explicitly at Muir. I 19, 2) will be discussed in subsequent chapters along with further examples of Muirchú's pointed use of scriptural allusion. Meanwhile the foregoing should give some indication of Muirchú's varied narrative exploitation of Scripture. Direct quotations, whether attributed (e.g. I 17, 2) or not (e.g. I 19, 4 = Gen. 15:6 and Rom. 4:3), and explicit references such as those to Nebuchadnezzar and Herod are employed on occasion, but an appreciation of their biblical setting is liable to endow the narrative with a further complex of associations relevant to its effect and message. For present purposes particular interest attaches to Muirchú's suggestive recreation of the underlying structure and message of certain biblical narratives by means of rather different surface details. A further example of this is Patrick's final contest with Lóegaire's pagan druid, who was burned in the green half of a wooden house whereas Patrick's disciple remained safe in the dry half (I 20, 9-13). Despite considerable differences of detail and a lack of obvious verbal echoes, this episode reproduces the core underlying Elijah's celebrated confrontation in God's name with the prophets of Baal before the backsliding king Ahab (1/3 Kgs. 18:17f.): whereas Baal failed to light the dry wood under his prophets' offering, God ignited the wet wood under Elijah's and the enemy were duly destroyed. All in all, there can be little doubt that the Bible provided a major and often subtle stimulus to Muirchú's fertile imagination.

Similar possibilities should be reckoned with in other branches of early Irish literature, including vernacular saga, and the second part of *Tochmarc Étaíne* may be worth considering in this respect. This tells how Ailill Ánguba became infatuated with his elder brother Eochaid's wife Étaín, fell sick, was tended by Etaín and arranged to make love with her. Love-sickness of this type is a sufficiently common saga motif to provide a plausible explanation of this narrative in terms of native origins, but there are also striking parallels with 2 Sam./Kgs. 13, in which David's son Ammon feigned sickness for love of Tamar, sister of his elder half-brother Absalom, and raped her as she tended him. This episode could well have been adapted by a the monastic writer of *Tochmarc Etaíne* to his own narrative purposes, which required a slight alteration in relations between the principals and the frustration of Ailill's lust by Midir. Proof can hardly be supplied in such a case, but a creative interplay of native and biblical models doeş look like a distinct possibility.

Considerations such as the above, which could probably be applied to rather more genres than the major ones just treated, chime in well with citations (see ch. 1, 11) from the pseudo-historical prologue to the *Senchus Már* and *Míadslechta* to the effect that Scripture and ecclesiastical Latin scholarship dominated the hybrid system of learning generated by the assimilation of poets, jurists and historians with presumed pre-Christian roots to a rising clerical and monastic cultural establishment. It is, of course, highly likely that originally pagan elements found their way into this amalgam, but certainly not as part of a deliberate policy to preserve manifestations of a paganism detested by the Church and her associates (see ch. 9,

8-14). Learned monastic interest in the pre-Christian past can be far more credibly ascribed to a desire to control and exploit its social and political potential with the help of perceived biblical parallels capable of being enhanced or even fabricated as occasion demanded. The corollary would, of course, be that the literate learned classes are unlikely to have treated pagan and oral raw material with anything like the tender respect so essential to the nativist conception of much early Irish literature.

4. A dualistic approach to that literature has encouraged a tendency to treat its Latin and Old or Middle Irish components in relative isolation from each other, but the truth is that virtually all early Irish literary genres were to a greater or lesser extent bilingual and that as a rule the predominance of Latin increases the further back one goes. Thus the earliest annalistic, genealogical and hagiographical material was compiled in Latin, the vernacular intruding increasingly as time went on. Inevitably, there were transitional phases in which Latin and Irish were freely intermingled, often in one and the same sentence, episode or entry. For instance, about a quarter of the roughly ninth-century Old Irish Life of Brigit is written in Latin, and there is no shortage of mixed passages in annals and genealogies. Similarly, one finds edificatory material in Latin, the vernacular or both, a particularly fine bilingual example being the seventh-century Cambrai Homily with alternating blocks of Latin and Old Irish (*Thes.* II 244-7). The glossing of a Latin text in Old Irish is by definition a bilingual undertaking, but the major eighth-century collections of Würzburg and Milan contain an abundance of Latin and mixed glosses too, and a similar linguistic mixture characterizes texts like the St. Gall charms against sickness, the mostly testamentary *Additamenta* in the Book of Armagh and the instructions in the Stowe Missal. A more detailed discussion of such phenomena with appropriate examples will be found elsewhere (McCone, 1989, 76-80). The deep interpenetration of secular and canon law in texts emanating from early medieval Ireland's monastic law schools has been alluded to earlier, and the admittedly fairly sparse examples of Latin citations in the former have been recently collected by Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen (1984, 430-8).

In the genres most closely associated with the *filid*, namely prose or prosimetrum sagas, various kinds of verse, linguistic and poetic treatises, the vernacular is overwhelmingly preponderant, as one might expect, but it is noticeable that snatches of Latin sometimes occur, particularly in various rubrics associated with the text. For example, verse or prose speech may be introduced by *dixit* 'said' or the like, the beginning or end of a text or episode may be marked by *incipit* or *finit* respectively, and the scribe of the Book of Leinster *Táin* concluded his massive vernacular undertaking with a striking Latin coda expressing some reservations about its validity. Even treatises such as the *Ériu* 13 tract and *Mittelirische Verslehren*, which were clearly written either by or for poets or both, are not afraid to use Latin here and there. Thus various sections of the *Verslehren* are marked by *incipit* and *finit*, Text II introduces "the twelve parts of poetry" in Latin in Laud 610 (*duodecim partes poeticae hae sunt*) but in Irish in Ballymote (*.xii. ernáil na filideachta annso sis*) (Thurneysen, 1891, 31), and *Ériu* 13, 36.17-9, backs the view that "the three divisions of voice are size, firmness and softness" (*at é teora ranna gotha .i. med, sonairte, ⁊ maoithe*) by quoting Cicero as source in Latin: *ut dixit Cicero, figura vocis in tres partes divi[di]tur, in magnitudinem, in firmitatem, et in mollitudinem.*

The Middle Irish etymological tract *Cóir Anmann* or 'The Fitness of Names' obviously owes much to the methodology of the late sixth- and early seventh-century Spanish bishop Isidore of Seville, and is quite prepared to base its inventive explanations on Latin, or even such bits of Greek as Isidore or the like had explained, in addition to Irish. For instance, the Munster dynastic name *Éoganacht* and its eponymous ancestor *Éogan* are given the following etymologies: "Eogan his name from procreation, i.e. *éogenesis*, i.e. good birth (*gein maith*) on account of its *eó*, i.e. *eu*, i.e. *bona* (cf. Isidore, *Etym.* VI ii 43). *Genesis* indeed is the *generatio* of Éogan (cf. *Etym.* VI ii 3). Éogan then is *bona generatio* in its analysis . . . From this comes *Éoganacht*, i.e. *bona acht[io]*, i.e. a good action (*acht maith*) of his to free the men of Ireland from famine. *Éoganacht*, i.e. *Éogan-icht*, i.e. the mercy (*icht*) of Éogan on the men of Ireland, or *Éogan-necht*, i.e. the offspring (*necht*) of Éogan, i.e. *necht* offspring (*clann*), i.e. the seven Éoganachta are the offspring of Éogan" (par. 37). When confronted with the need for a rhyme with an otherwise intractable Latin saint's name, the obviously monastic poet who produced the Old Irish *Félire Oengusso* around 800 A.D. has recourse to Latin, as in the striking verse *togairm Fintain choraig/* ***post contemptum mundi/*** *hi féil chaín co llaindi/* ***Viruli, Iucundi*** (Feb. 21). Verses wholly or predominantly in Latin also occur in basically Old Irish hymns ascribed to Colmán, Ultán and Broccán (*Thes.* II 302, 303.5, 326.8-9, 349.13-4). These phenomena indicate not only monastically educated authors familiar with Latin but also readers and reciters expected to have similar backgrounds and attainments.

This intermingling of Latin and the vernacular to varying extents is, of course, precisely what one would expect to find in the literary products of a monastically oriented learned class. As argued towards the end of chapter one, the most esteemed members of this were Latin scholars, jurists, historians and poets apparently bound together by literacy and a core educational syllabus on to which their various specializations were grafted. This state of affairs would presumably have been almost ideal for promoting a free and creative interplay between native and ecclesiastical material, Latin and the vernacular. Some evidence has already been presented to suggest that intensive cross-fertilization of this kind lies at the heart of most extant medieval Irish literature, and this should accumulate as the book progresses. The present chapter will continue to concentrate upon certain aspects of narrative genre, style and technique that may have a bearing upon the central question.

In this and other biblically oriented cultures any theory of a language's origins was bound to be based upon the Tower of Babel episode in Genesis 11. Isidore's doctrine in the opening sections of the ninth book of his Etymologies is that Hebrew was the original language of mankind, that this, Latin and Greek are the three sacred languages by virtue of being used on the cross and as such are superior to the remainder of the seventy two or three, including Irish (IX ii 103), recognised by him as the product of God's confusion of mankind at the tower. This account lies at the heart of the Old Irish canonical section of the poets' manual, *Auraicept na nÉces*, but the status of Irish was greatly enhanced by a neat twist. This represented the eponymous ancestor of the *Féni* or Irish, Fénius Farsaid, as staying on after the dispersal at the tower, located in Egypt, and being asked by the seventy-two pupils of his school to extract a language for their use. The text goes on to claim with wonderful audacity that "what was best then of every language and what was widest and

finest was cut out into Irish" (Ahlqvist, 1982, 97-8), which is thus represented as a virtual reconstitution of mankind's original pre-Babel idiom. Thus a doctrine inspired by Isidore and the Bible asserted a privileged position for Irish ahead even of Isidore's three sacred tongues, and obviously provided a charter for its written cultivation alongside one of these, Latin, in the monasteries. After all, if the Bible could be composed in two different languages, why should Irish monastic literature not be similarly bilingual?

5. In most early Indo-European literatures such as those of India, Greece and Rome there is almost always a clear divide between prose and verse texts, whereas certain types of early Irish narrative are quite prone to intersperse prose narrative and dialogue with verse put into the mouths of the characters themselves. There is no better illustration of the exotic preferences of modern nativism than the theory of Indian parallels and Indo-European origins which was advanced by Myles Dillon (1947, 9-11) on the basis of earlier work by Windisch and has remained largely unchallenged since. India's oldest bodies of verse and prose literature are respectively the often highly allusive poems of the Rigveda and the somewhat later prosaic ritual prescriptions of the Brāhmaṇas. The former sometimes take the form of dialogues and the latter occasionally rise to a simple prose tale explaining the origin of a ritual. It is hardly surprising that the Brāhmaṇas should on occasion cite authoritative Vedic verses, and a couple of instances where such verses from an allusive Rigvedic strophic dialogue are inserted into plain Brāhmaṇic prose have been held to mirror an ancient narrative technique in which difficult verse alternated with explanatory prose. At first, we are told, only the verse was written down, the prose being recited orally, but later this too came to be added in one or two cases. Whether in prose or verse, allusive literature requires a knowledge of the necessary background for its effect, but this is a far cry from positing simultaneous explanation, so to speak. After all, what is the point of writing a long and metrically elaborate allusive poem only to have it interrupted by banal prose explanations after every single verse? Are we to suppose, for instance, that the recitation of the often mythically allusive odes of classical poets like Pindar or Horace, not to mention Classical Modern Irish bardic poetry, was disrupted by prose explanations whenever the going got difficult? Such procedures would presumably have been both aesthetically intolerable and insulting to the audience's intelligence.

Nevertheless, this extraordinary speculation about the origins of a most atypical mixture of prose and verse in a couple of brief Indian learned narratives from the first millenium B.C. has formed the basis of a comparison with certain types of Irish saga from the early Christian period, and this in turn has spawned a theory of mixed prose and verse sagas among the non-literate Indo-Europeans some three millenia or more B.C. The grounds for this far-reaching inference are flimsy, to say the least, and an explanation in terms of factors nearer home would be more convincing.

We may begin by noting that two of the most influential works of the early Middle Ages in Western Europe, the *De Nuptiis Mercurii et Philologiae* of Martianus Capella and Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, are cast in so-called prosimetrum form with alternating verse and prose from the author's own pen. It was, of course, realised that the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, was partly in prose and partly in verse, and Isidore's teaching was that various types of poetry originated with the Hebrews, were imitated by the Greeks and spread thence to the

Romans. For example, in *Etymologiae* I xxxix 11 he claims that Moses' great canticle in chapter 32 of Deuteronomy was the first epic poem and Job the first elegiac. Moreover, in VI ii 12 Isidore points out that Job is a verse dialogue with a narrative prose introduction and conclusion. The studding of plain prose narrative with poetic utterances put into the mouths of various characters is a prominent Old Testament trait, and the mannered parallelisms, antitheses and so on of Hebrew poetry are often still apparent in Latin translation, a number of such poetic utterances in the Vulgate's narrative being clearly recognised as canticles. Chapters 36-9 of Isaiah and the opening of St. Luke's Gospel are good examples of simple prose narrative generously interlarded with speech and dialogue, some of this prosaic enough but a major part unmistakenly poetic in tone. This recurrent biblical pattern seems an eminently plausible starting point for the development of mixed prose and verse narratives by early Irish monks whose lives revolved round scriptural study and a daily sequence of divine offices in which prayers and lessons alternated with the singing of psalms, hymns and canticles.

Poetic speech in early Irish narrative is usually introduced by the *as:bert* or *dixit* X formula or trivial variants thereof. In verse dialogue forms of *fris:gair* 'replies' may also appear, as in *ro:recair Fergus* (*Táin*[1] 244), and combinations like *fris:gart in tres fer co n-epert* "the third man replied and said" (*Togail Bruidne Da Derga* 326) are, of course, possible. A third major category comprises versions of the formula 'X (then) sang a/this (poem) (to Y) (and said)', e.g. *ro:chachain in tres fer laíd dó* (*Togail Bruidne Da Derga* 303), *cachain Fergus in laíd so sís* (*Táin*[1] 272) or *conid and ro:chan Fergus inso co n-ebairt* (*Táin*[1] 2392). As far as I can see, these types are very similar to the main biblical modes of introducing poetic utterance within prose narrative. Thus the canticle-ridden beginning of Luke's Gospel repeatedly uses the *dixit* or *ait* X formula or a trivial variant, the highly poetic dialogue in Job is usually punctuated by the formula *respondens autem* X *dixit*, and two great Old Testament canticles, the song of Moses and the Israelites after crossing the Red Sea and the song of Deborah, are introduced as follows at Exodus 15:15 and Judges 5:1 respectively: *tunc cecinit Moses et filii Israhel carmen hoc Domino et dixerunt* and *cecinerunt Debbora et Barac filius Abinoem in die illo dicentes.* It is, of course, possible that these similarities are coincidental, given that poetic statements are being introduced throughout, but the resemblance is fairly striking and seems more likely to have arisen through imitation of familiar biblical models by the monastic authors of early Irish sagas. Whatever their origins, these phraseological parallels with the Bible would hardly have been lost on such writers, and are eminently compatible with the hypothesis that early Christian Irish prosimetrum narrative was initially inspired by biblical and liturgical patterns before acquiring a momentum of its own.

6. The bulk of extant Old and Middle Irish verse is based on syllabic rhythms typically generated by sequences, often stanzas, of lines with a regular syllable count overall and a specific syllabic configuration for the final word, a particularly common type consisting of quatrains of heptasyllabic lines with a disyllabic cadence ($7^2\ 7^2\ 7^2\ 7^2$) or an arrangement whereby the end of the second line regularly has one or rarely two syllables more than that of the previous line ($7^x\ 7^{x+1}\ 7^x\ 7^{x+1}$). The main ornament of such poetry is rhyme between a given pair or pairs of final words, whether in contiguous lines (first with second, third with fourth) or alternate ones (second with fourth, sometimes also first with third). A rougher end-rhyme known

as consonance may supplement a full rhyme between the finals of two other lines, and there may be the further ornament of full rhymes involving internal words or of alliterations between contiguous stressed words. Early Irish rhyming syllabic metres have been described and illustrated by Gerard Murphy (1961b, 26-90), who argues cogently that the central features of rhyme and regular syllable count derive ultimately from early medieval Latin religious poetry (ibid. 8-25), a hypothesis recently corroborated by David Sproule's revolutionary identification of a transitional "concentration on rhyme in the final syllable" (1987, 198). This implies "a phase in Irish metrics when the attention of the poet, in creating rhyme, worked from the final syllable backwards, rather than from the stressed syllable forwards", a system easy enough to derive "from Latin rhyme, which 'was normally only in an unstressed last syllable'" (ibid.,: 199).

In Old and Middle Irish literature this kind of poetry seems steadily to have supplanted a different type based upon stress rhythm with alliteration as the key ornament. The most regular and readily recognisable form consists of short lines or cola with two or sometimes three primary stresses and runs of binding alliteration between the last stressed word of one colon and the first stressed constituent of the next. A good example occurs in the striking episode of the saga *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* where king Conaire's son makes three attempts to dissuade three red horsemen from infringing his father's taboo by preceding him to Da Derga's hostel. The third horseman gives three doom-laden replies, the first of which conforms fully to this pattern (alliterations in boldface): én a ***meic/ mór a scél/ scél ó bruidin/ bélot long/ lúaichet fern-gablach/ fían-galach ndoguir. cned míscad/ mór bét/ bé-find fors(a):ndestetar/ deirg-indlid áir/ én a meic*** "lo, o lad, great the tale, a tale from a hostel, an encounter of ships, a flashing of shields-and-spears *fían*-valorous (and) woeful. Wound (and) curse [/curse of wounds], great (the) misdeed, white-woman on whom have settled red-inlays of slaughter, lo, o lad" (par. 32, cf. *LU* 6790-2). Further examples are given by Murphy (1961b, 3-6).

As Carney has demonstrated with appropriate illustrations in a brilliant pioneering article on various types of accentual poetry and the transition to rhymed syllabic verse, the principle of stress count may be combined with syllable counting of the cadence or with rhyme and "as Irish poetry developed rhyme made continual inroads on the function of alliteration" (1971, 55). The trend towards assonance and rhyme is well illustrated by the two-stress poem on the Éoganacht ascribed to Luccraid moccu Chíara (*Corp. Gen.* 199-202). This has binding alliteration but is also arranged in quatrains with rhyme or occasionally mere consonance between the finals of the second and fourth two-stress cola. It uses both biblical and related 'invasion' genealogies (see above), and a rough date is indicated by the fact that it comes no further down than the mid-seventh-century Munster dynast Cú-cen-máthair. Here, however, an example will be provided by the following rather crude jingle from *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (par. 157, cf. *LU* 7950-1), which seems to be based upon seven two-stress cola paired to give three long and leave a final short line. The second line repeats the first with substitution of an alliterating synonym *fó* for *maith*. There is full rhyme between *Cécht* in the second and *écht* in the fourth line, a rough progressive assonance between *dig, rig* and *-gní* in the three final cola, but virtually no binding alliteration.

Maith fer/ Mac Cécht	"Good fellow Mac Cécht,
Fó fer/ Mac Cécht	Fine fellow Mac Cécht.

Do:beir dig/ con:oí rig He brings a drink that saves a king.
Do:gní écht He performs a feat."

It is to be noted that the introduction of rhyme tends to periodize the structure into larger articulated units.

Because of a comparative shortage of monosyllables and the accentuation of polysyllables on the antepenultimate or penultimate syllable later Latin accentual poetry tended strongly towards a di- or trisyllabic cadence. This is the obvious model for Irish stress metres with a preference for such cadences, a good example being the hymn to Patrick analysed by Murphy (1961b, 4; *Thes. II* 322; but see Breatnach, 1981, for an alternative analysis). This seems to be based on two- and three-stress units ending, with two probable exceptions (*mór gein* and *Día lem*), on a di- or trisyllable, and contains plenty of linking alliterations. One might compare the short alliterative poem in *Compert Con Culainn* (par. 7) with two- and three-stress lines of 6^3 6^3 7^{1+2} 7^3 8^3 and 7^3 syllables. Intensification of two prominent features of such comparatively free structures seems to have produced the well attested regularization of a three-stress line with trisyllabic cadence. A good heavily alliterative example is provided by *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* par. 93 (*LU* 7270-80, cf. the much longer but less regular poem of this type in par. 100, *LU* 7370-7428):

Trechenn tri fothucht/ Fomórach (8^3)
nad- ndelb duine/ nduinegein (7^3)
fora ndreich duaichni/ -díulathar (8^3)
roda- ler lond/ -láthrastar. (7^3)
Lánchenn tri lorg/ línfiaclach (7^3)
ó urbél co úae/ rechtaire. (8^3)
Múad muinter cech/ cétglonnaig (8^3)
claid[b]ib tri slúag/ selgatar (7^3)
ro:selt ar borg/ mbúiredach (7^3)
bruidne Da Derga/ turchomruc. (8^3)

"Triple head, three abdomens of the Fomorians, from whom neither human form (nor) human birth may be removed on their strange countenance which the raging sea has arranged for them. A full head of three full-toothed rows from front lip to ear (as) steward [i.e. carver of food?]. Fine the following of each (man) of a hundred exploits, with swords they shall hack [modal pret., or "swords shall hack" without emendation] through the host that has descended on the noisy stronghold in the gathering of Da Derga's hostel." The apparent insistence upon a first half-line at least as long as and preferably longer than the second, while avoiding words of three or more syllables, made for a line at least six or, usually, seven syllables long and unlikely to exceed eight or nine. From this it would have been but a small step to regularization of the heptasyllabic type (7^3) and a concomitant reduction in alliteration on occasion.

Calvert Watkins has suggested that such unrhymed heptasyllabic verse is too widespread in gnomic legal poetry to reflect ecclesiastical Latin influence and so is more likely to derive with considerable manipulation from an Indo-European syllabic type best preserved in Vedic Sanskrit (1963, 212-20). The mounting evidence referred to above for extensive ecclesiastical influence upon even the earliest Old Irish law tracts invalidates a major step in this argument, which is further vitiated by its failure to account for a substantial body of material with a regular stress pattern but an irregular syllable count. Indeed, most of the valuable examples given

by Watkins are quite heavily alliterative and can be just as plausibly analysed in terms of two or three stresses with trisyllabic cadence, the preponderance of the latter increasing still further if we accept Carney's (1971, 25) suggestion that initial proclitics sometimes do duty for a fully stressed word. As indicated above, the obvious overall explanation is that a native accentual and alliterative measure incorporated a syllabically regular cadence under the influence of accentual Latin hymnody and that this resulted in pressure towards isosyllabism alongside a two- or three-stress count, the former gradually displacing the latter as the basic rhythmical principle. Meanwhile the ornaments of assonance and rhyme were being developed from late Latin models and gradually restricting the role of alliteration. The convergence of these major innovations, both attested at least as early as the seventh century and apparently introduced by the Church as Murphy suggested, finally produced the rhyming syllabic metres dominant throughout Old, Middle and early Modern Irish literature.

As Murphy remarks, "in Irish syllabic verse, and also often in the older poetry, the last word or syllable of the *íarcomarc* ('final stanza') echoes the first word or syllable of the first line of the poem. A poem in which this echo does not occur is said to lack a *dúnad* ('conclusion')" (1961b, 43). The three stressed or otherwise rhetorically structured poetic utterances of the three red horsemen cited above and below exemplify a still more extensive correspondence, the same line (*én a meic*) being repeated both at the beginning and the end of each passage, as can also happen sometimes in rhyming syllabic verse (e.g. *Scéla Cano* ll. 73-84). Alter refers to "the general fondness of ancient Hebrew writers in all genres for so-called envelope structures (in which the conclusion somehow echoes terms or whole phrases from the beginning)" (Alter and Kermode, 1987, 621), and this is a feature able to survive translation. A particularly obvious instance is provided by the identical first and last verses of Psalm 8, and the significance of this was well appreciated by an Old Irish glossator: "as it is with praise and admiration of the Lord that this psalm begins, it is likewise, moreover, that it is concluded, even as the poets (*filid*) do among us" (Ml. 26^{b}10, cf. Murphy, 1961b, 43-4). It thus seems more than likely that this important feature of much medieval Irish poetry from at least the eighth century onwards is rooted in a tendency of biblical poetry often still apparent in the Latin version.

This emphasis upon a likely broad evolutionary outline should not obscure the fact that the old continued to exist alongside and to interact with the new. Consequently early Irish verse is exceedingly varied despite the steadily expanding use of rhyming syllabic metres. Broadly speaking, stress count, syllable count or combinations of the two determine its various rhythms and these in turn may be ornamented by alliteration, assonance/rhyme or both. There is, of course, a tendency for stress patterns to correlate with alliteration and for syllabic structures to correlate with rhyme and consonance, but this is far from absolute.

7. The interruption of more or less plain prose narrative or exposition by metrical or otherwise stylised and ornamented passages usually represented as speech is common enough in vernacular sagas and legal tracts. Authoritative legal maxims of this kind are sometimes ascribed to a particular individual, as in the case of *ara:chain Cenn Fáelad díchetal do chórus eculsa a n-as:[m]bert* "Cenn Fáelad recites an incantation on the proper arrangement of the Church when he said" after the prose

introduction of *Bretha Nemed* (*CIH* 2212.3-4), but are more usually introduced by a non-specific *ara:chain féinechus* "the law recites it" or the like. Authoritative Old Testament law is, of course, similarly enunciated by God or his prophet Moses from Exodus to Deuteronomy. More or less regular metrical structures, including rhyming syllabic poems in the sagas, account for a significant proportion of this heightened material but a great deal of it cannot be reduced to such definable accentual or syllabic patterns, at least in the present state of knowledge. As Breatnach judiciously puts it, "Old Irish texts appear in three forms: prose, rhyming syllabic verse and *rosc*. The simplest definition of *rosc* is that it is neither of the other two. Much work remains to be done on the various sub-categories of *rosc*, but at present we can distinguish three main types: the first consists of syllabically regular lines with a fixed cadence and alliteration, but without rhyme; the second of lines with regular number of stressed words per line and alliteration; while the third type shows no apparent regular syllabic or stress pattern, but is heavily alliterative. Furthermore, *rosc* is characterised by various linguistic features, usually referred to as 'Archaic Irish', which are not found in prose, but are found in Old Irish rhyming syllabic verse" (1984, 452-3).

The various possibilities can be illustrated from the famous episode of the three red horsemen in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*. As remarked above, the third of these utters three *laíd* 'lays' of this kind, each beginning *én a meic, mór a scél* and duly marked *.r.* in the margin of *LU*. The first has already been analysed as a regular two-stress structure with binding alliteration broken only once. The second, however, seems not to go beyond a few random alliterating pairs: *én a meic, mór a scél, gerthiut gorthiut robruth ríg eslabrae tri doilbthiu fer forsaid for dáim, dám nónbair, én a meic* "lo, o lad, great the tale, there sears you, there scorches you the great ardour of a generous king through figments of wise men on retinue, a retinue of nine, lo, o lad" (par. 34, *LU* 6879-80). The first part of the third passage is hardly marked by alliteration and seems rather to depend on a modified chiastic repetition (attribute [adj.] - head noun - verb, verb - head noun - attribute [gen.] + preposition phrase) plus a simple semantic contrast ('alive - dead'), but the conclusion is a perfectly regular two-stress poem with linking alliteration: *én a meic, mór a scél, scítha eich ima:ríadam, im:ríadam eochu Duind Tetscoraig a sídaib; ciammin bí ammin mairb/ móra airdi/ airdbi sáegail/ sásad fíach/ fothad (m)bran/ bresal airlig/ airlachtad fáebuir/ ferna[ib] tul-bochtaib/ tráthaib íar fuin,/ én a meic* "lo, o lad, great the tale, tired the horses which we ride about on, we ride about on the horses of Dond Tetscorach from the *síd*-mounds. Though we are alive, we are dead. Great (the) signs, cutting off of life, satisfying of ravens, sustenance of crows, strife of slaughter, sharpening (?) of cutting edge on shields with broken bosses in (the) hours after sunset" (par. 35, *LU* 6806-9). In this particular instance, then, the overall structure resembles a sandwich with a somewhat non-descript filling symmetrically framed by regular blocks.

After stating that "already in the older prose sagas, especially the longer ones, there are scattered pieces in poetic form or elevated language" Thurneysen described the unrhymed non-strophic type as follows: "(it) bears the name *retoric* from the Latin adverb *rhetorice*. Such passages are marked in some manuscripts by an *.r.* written in the margin. It is presumably through a misunderstanding of this *r.* that later texts then sometimes call them *rosc* or *roscad* 'maxims'. They consist mostly of very short sentences or phrases, often bound together by alliteration, in extremely

figurative language with unusual word order, rare words or forms of words and loose syntactic structure. Sometimes a certain parallelism of the constituents seems to be intended, so that they recall the Church sequences. As the name *retoric* indicates, it is the highly rhetorical language particularly valued in late Latin that served as a model for their composers" (1921, 54).

This hypothesis of major Latin influence did not prevent Thurneysen from indulging in further unprovable speculation about possible oral and native origins in ecstatic mantic utterance (ibid. 55). Encouraged by Bergin's impressive argument for the survival of archaic final verbs in such material (1938), the subsequent trend was to discount the possibility of ecclesiastical Latin influence and treat it as the debris of largely pagan oral poetry later grafted more or less mechanically onto written prose texts. Dissenting from this view, Carney pointed out that a fairly long composition of this kind at the end of the early saga *Aided Chonchobuir* was not only thoroughly Christian but also a major and integral constituent of the extant tale. In consequence "nativist scholars would do well to reflect upon the fact that this Christian chronologist sat down and deliberately composed the difficult, obscure, and archaic-seeming rhetoric which Conchobar was supposed to have uttered when he heard of the Crucifixion. From this it would emerge that we can never assume that merely because rhetorics contain linguistic archaisms they are older in point of composition or 'writing down' than the text in which they are incorporated" (1955, 298).

Binchy countered this with the claim that "those of us who hold what Carney calls 'nativist' views and look on 'rhetorics as being of native and pre-literate origin' do not regard the composition of them as abruptly ceasing with the adoption of Christianity. Indeed what must be the longest text of this kind, the *Bretha Nemed*, includes a lengthly interpolation on the status of the Church in Irish society. Obviously this was composed by a Christian jurist of the sixth or seventh century, but it must have been handed down by oral tradition for several generations before being committed to writing by a scribe who . . . can hardly have understood more than one word in three" (1972, 29). Thus "when fragments of this oral tradition were first committed to writing (perhaps as early as the sixth century), the *roscada* had already been transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth. Their language was from that period on congealed in ink, and we may assume that those who first wrote them down understood it reasonably well, unlike those who copied and recopied them much later" (ibid. 31). It therefore appears legitimate to ask: "does not all this apply, *mutatis mutandis* to the so-called 'rhetorics'? Like the legal *roscada* they are suddenly interpolated in the middle of a straightforward Old Irish (or, as in later recensions of a saga, Middle Irish) text. That all or most of them were 'composed' at the same time as the rest of the text is in my view linguistically impossible; one might as well argue that the archaic passages quoted in the tracts of the *Senchas Mór*, often introduced by the words *amail aracain* (or *arindchain*) *fénechus* 'as the traditional law chants (it)', were the work of those who compiled the tracts of that celebrated law-book about the beginning of the eighth century" (ibid. 32).

Indeed one might, following Breatnach's recent demonstration that some *roscad* in *Bretha Nemed* can be dated to the early eighth century, derives from a Latin original and is probably contemporary with a nearby passage virtually repeating its contents in plain Old Irish prose (1984). Moreover, the alliterative *roscad* with prose

introduction entitled *Udacht Aithirne* or 'Testament of Aithirne' in the *Ériu* 13 tract on poets exhibits a "strongly trinitarian character" which "clearly shows it to be based upon the Athanasian creed" (Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 1984, 420-30). The so-called 'pseudo-historical' prologue to the *Senchus Már*, which will figure prominently in chapter four, is built round a *roscad* put into the mouth of the poet Dubthach maccu Lugair. This composition apparently consists of two- and three-stress cola with pretty regular binding alliteration, and displays various 'archaic' word-order patterns. However, it is integrally bound up and presumably contemporary with much of the surrounding prose, can hardly be earlier in date than about 700 A.D. by virtue of presupposing certain features of Muirchú's Life of Patrick, and is replete with biblical quotations and allusions (Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 1984, 387-92; McCone, 1986c).

It can similarly be argued that the prophecies of the three red horsemen in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* mesh fully with the imminent destruction to be unleashed by warlike *fían*-bands and with the view ascribing king Conaire's doom to revenge for his maternal grandsire Eochaid's devastation of the *síd*-mound of *Brí Léith* while attempting to recover his wife Étaín alias Bé-find 'white-woman' (cf. *LU* 8010-9, 6741-4). This might seem unfair but is hardly unbiblical: "visiting the inquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Exodus 34:7, cf. Deut. 5:9). The Bible, of course, contains some famous apocalyptic equestrians with strikingly coloured mounts. Thus Zechariah "saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse (*vir ascendens super equum rufum*) . . . and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white (*equi rufi varii et albi*)" (1:8, cf. 6:2-4), but the second of the four horsemen of the apocalypse on their different coloured steeds in Revelation 6:4 seems particularly germane: "and there went out another horse that was red (*alius equus rufus*): and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another". Since this is precisely what the three reds (*tri deirg*) presage in this tale of the destruction of the appropriately named Da Derga's hostel, it seems unlikely that its monastic moulders were uninfluenced by the biblical symbolism. Indeed, the recalcitrant red horsemen are arguably a trio in prefiguration of Conaire's death at the hands of the three sons of Dond Désa otherwise known as "the three red hounds" (*tri rúad-choin*, cf. Knott, 1936, 72-4). Here too, then, *roscad* or *retoiric* appears as part and parcel of an Old Irish prose narrative in an episode probably coloured by and perhaps even partially created from scriptural imagery.

Further evidence is thus steadily accumulating in support of Carney's insight, which in any case does not rule out the possibility that older material of this kind could on occasion be embedded in later prose texts. The present state of play is that *roscada* or rhetorics as such need be neither oral nor archaic, let alone pagan, and that the ball is firmly in the court of those seeking to claim at least a nucleus of ancient oral survivals in a genre known to us only in writing.

8. Prior to 1966 it was generally accepted that the term *rosc* or *roscad* was restricted in the early period to poetically adorned legal maxims (cf. Binchy, 1972, 30-1) and that formally similar passages liable to be marked by *.r.* in the margin of saga manuscripts should be designated 'rhetorics' for the simple reason that on the few occasions when this *.r.* is expanded in the oldest saga manuscripts (e.g. *LU* 7438, *LL* 14385) *retoiric* is used, not *roscad*. Mac Cana, however, then suggested that *.r.*

originated as an abbreviation of the native word despite the lack of early attestations, and accordingly made light of the testimony of *LU* and *LL*: "it is true that the word *retoiric* is sometimes (though not very frequently) used of passages in 'rhetorical' language. It is also true that the scribe M of LU appears to equate *.r.* with *retoric* . . . However, since there is no evidence of its use among native scholars before the eleventh century, one must seriously consider the possibility that the equation was made and the term *retoiric* given currency by the LU scribe himself or by a recent monastic predecessor" (1966, 71). In view of the complete absence of extant saga manuscripts predating the beginning of the twelfth century this is a rather surprising *argumentum ex silentio*, but the article concludes with the frank admission regarding *retoiric* that "the most serious objection to it is the unfounded implication of Latin origin for the *gènre* which seems to be inseparable from it and which had so influenced Thurneysen and other scholars" (ibid., 90). Since it is far from obvious that the assertion of unprovable pagan origins is any better founded, it seems preferable to use the only expansion of *.r.* for which there is direct pre-Norman evidence and call these passages in sagas 'rhetorics'.

One should, moreover, not be too lightly dismissive of Thurneysen's considered opinion that this genre had, despite assumed pagan oral antecedents, undergone major Latin influence reflected in its name. Since there appear to be no convincing Latin models, the verse consisting of two- or three-stress cola linked by alliteration and reminiscent of old Germanic *Stabreim* poetry (cf. Murphy, 1961b, 6-7) has the best claim to be considered basically 'native'. It has already been suggested that this was the foundation upon which the catalyst of Latin models worked to trigger evolution towards syllable counting and rhyme, and it can be plausibly regarded as the main source of alliteration as a more general ornamental device. The Latin Bible seems not to have figured in the discussion so far but may help to account for some further stylistic tendencies of saga rhetoric and legal *roscad*, particularly the former.

The precise nature of Hebrew poetry is a notoriously vexed question and, in Alter's words, "at least one scholar, despairing of a coherent account of biblical verse, has contended that there was no distinct concept of formal versification in ancient Israel but merely a "continuum" of parallelistic rhetoric from prose to what we misleadingly call poetry" (Alter and Kermode, 1987, 612). Whatever its validity or otherwise in relation to the original text, this is the impression almost inevitably conveyed by Latin and other translations, and as such may have encouraged those less determinate types of *retoiric* or *roscad* variously ranged in the interstices between standard prose and formal verse.

Alter notes that a common device in biblical poetry is "parallelism of meaning" ("that is, if the poet says "hearken" in the first verset, he is likely to say something like "listen" or "heed" in the second verset"), accompanied "sometimes by parallel syntactic patterns as well" or even by "double chiasm"' (ibid. 612-3). Stylistic features like these fare well in Latin translation, e.g. *in tribulatione mea invocabo Dominum et ad Deum meum clamabo* "in my tribulation I shall invoke the Lord and to my God I shall call" (2 Sam./Kgs. 22:7), the chiastic *funes inferi circumdederunt me, praevenerunt me laquei mortis* "the ropes of hell have encompassed me, there have preceded me the nooses of death" (ibid. 6) or the more repetitive *venerunt reges et pugnaverunt, pugnaverunt reges Chanaan in Thanach iuxta aquas Mageddo* "there came kings and fought, so fought the kings of Canaan in Tanach by the waters of Megiddo" (Jud. 5:19). So too do mannered antitheses

like *deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles* "he hath put down the lofty from their seat and hath raised up the lowly" (Luke 1:53).

Whether by coincidence, design or a combination of both, broadly psalmodic traits of this kind are not uncommon in Old Irish rhetorics despite frequent alliterative constraints, e.g. from the last two ostensibly 'pagan' *én a meic* poems cited earlier the chiastic *scítha eich ima:ríadam, im:ríadam eochu Duind Tetscoraig a sídaib* "tired the horses we ride, we ride the horses of Dond Tetscorach from the *síd*-mounds" (cf. Jud. 5:19 above), the antithetical *ciammin bí ammin mairb* "though we are alive, we are dead", the paired synonyms *gerthiut, gorthiut* "sears thee, scorches thee" (cf. *invocabo . . . clamabo* above), or the semantic and syntactic parallelism between *sásad fíach* "satisfying of ravens" and *fothad bran* "sustaining of crows". Also worth noting are plays upon words, e.g. the transformation of the conventional sartorial formula *dergindled óir* "red-inlay of gold" (e.g. *Scéla Cano* l. 32, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* l. 10) into the nearly homonymous but quite unexpected and correspondingly effective *dergindlid áir* "red-inlays of slaughter" disfiguring the contrasted *Bé-find* "White-woman" at the end of the first *én a meic* poem cited earlier. Fergus' rhetoric near the end of *Compert Con Culainn* begins with a regular accentual measure of three- and two-stress cola bound by alliteration. There is much syntactic as well as some semantic (e.g. *amnas-gal-gaisced* "strong-valour-martial prowess"/ *gniae* "martial champion"/ *túaing* "sustaining"'/ *dín* "shelter"') parallelism, but in the final pair of syntactically parallel three-stress units alliteration is apparently replaced by an antithesis very reminiscent of biblical patterns like the dyad above from the *Magnificat* in Luke's Gospel: *am trén, am trebar, am techtaire;/ nída(m) t[h]áir ar feib ná ar indmus;/ am amnas ar gail ⁊ gaisciud;/ am gniae frim tháir;/ am túalaing mo daltai;/ am dín cech dochraite;/ do:gníu dochur cech tríuin,/ do:gníu sochur cech lobair* "I am strong, I am prudent, I am a courier (emend to *techtaide* "proper"?); I am not shameful as regards wealth and fortune; I am strong as regards valour and prowess; I am a champion against my shaming; I am capable of (sustaining) my foster-son; I am a shelter from every hardship; I bring about the disadvantage of every strong person, I bring about the advantage of every weak person".

Pending much-needed further research, dogmatic assertions about this type of Old Irish material are best avoided. In the meantime, the gradually emerging picture of considerable formal diversity, stylistic sophistication and creative application should at least discourage crude and unsupported assertions that it does not transcend the mindless preservation or mechanical imitation of oral fossils.

9. Paul Russell's recent study of Cormac's Glossary (1988) has shown among other things that etymological speculation in early Christian Ireland was fully in tune with continental norms as enunciated by an ecclesiastic like Isidore of Seville, and Rolf Baumgarten (1987) has demonstrated that the etymological explanations of the names of people and, above all, places common in early Irish narrative often function as major constituents in or even the creative mainspring of a tale or episode. Baumgarten further argues that modern 'neogrammarian' contempt for classical and medieval etymological method has led to unjustified neglect of this crucial intellectual instrument, which was, in Isidore's words, based upon the notion that knowledge of a word's etymology "often has a necessary function in its interpretation. For when you have seen whence a name has arisen, you understand its

meaning more readily. For the inspection of everything is clearer when the etymology is known" (*Etymologiae* I xxix 2).

Valid though these observations are, the teaching of Isidore hardly provided a direct model for the use of etymology as a narrative device or alternatively the use of narrative as an etymological device that is so abundant in early Irish literature. The Bible, on the other hand, would be a very plausible source, since Old Testament narrative pullulates with episodes explaining the name of a person or place. Moreover, Jerome was keenly aware of this aspect, so much so that, for instance, in the story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib at Gen. 2:23 he prefers a semantically bizarre Latin equivalent to continuing the Greek Septuagint's failure to reflect the crucial derived status of Hebrew *'iššāh* 'woman' in relation to *'īš* 'man' in translation: "she shall be called 'woman (*virago*)' because she was taken out of man (*de viro*)".

In line with this concern, etymologically significant placenames are usually, and personal names occasionally, rendered by a Latin translation that brings out the connection with the explanatory narrative clearly . A handful of typical examples must suffice here, e.g. "and they came to Marath and could not drink the waters of Mara because they were bitter (*nec poterant bibere aquas de Mara eo quod essent amarae*), wherefore he also imposed name fitting the place, calling it Mara, that is bitterness (*unde et congruum loco nomen inposuit vocans illud Mara id est amaritudinem*; Ex. 15:23)". When Gideon feared for his life after beholding an angel, "the Lord said unto him 'Peace with thee (*pax tecum*). Fear not, thou shalt not die'. Therefore Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord and called it 'the Lord's Peace (*Domini Pax*)', since down to the present day it was still in Ephra, which is of the family of Ezra" (Jud. 6:23-4). After Samson's famous slaughter of the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass (*maxilla asini*) "he cast away the jawbone out of his hand and called the name of that place Ramath-lehi, which is translated 'elevation of the jawbone (*Elevatio Maxillae*)'" (Judges 15:17, cf. 2:15, 1 Sam./Kgs. 7:10-3 etc.). Of the young Solomon we are told that Nathan the prophet "called his name God's Beloved (*Amabilis Deo*) because the Lord loved him (*eo quod diligeret eum Dominus*)" (2 Sam./Kgs. 12:25). Thanks to a separate work by Jerome on the etymology of Hebrew names in the Bible, the *Liber de Nominibus Hebraicis*, the narrative significance of a name could be appreciated even where the Vulgate did not give a Latin equivalent, e.g. *Ismahel interpretatur Auditio Dei; sic enim scriptum est (Genes. 16:11): 'Et vocavit nomen eius Ismael, quia exaudivit eum Deus'* "Ishmael is translated 'God's Hearing'; for thus it is written: 'and she called his name Ishmael because God heard him'" (Isidore, *Etymologiae* VII vi-ix).

The author of the medieval Irish saga *Cath Maige Mucrama* (O'Daly, 1975) is an example of someone who makes considerable narrative use of etymologies of the names of people and places. Again two or three illustrations will serve here. "Ailill had intercourse with the maiden. While he was at this the woman sucked his ear (*ó*) so that she left neither flesh nor skin on it and so that it never grew on it from that time. So that Ailill Bare-ear (*Ó-lomm*) is his name since" (par. 3). Later on the name is slightly distorted to *Mag Mucríma* and etymologised as 'Plain of Pig-counting' with the help of an elaborate aetiological tale about the difficulty of counting (*rím*) some destructive magical pigs from Hell (*muc*) (par. 34-7). Moreover, although this is not explicitly stated, the striking episode about Lugaid and his followers being forced to eat mice (par. 26-30) seems to have been triggered by the similarity of the

hero's name to the Old Irish word for mouse, *luch*, acc. *lochaid*. It thus appears distinctly possible, to say the least, that the etymological machinery so prominent in early Irish narrative literature owes its initial impetus to the Bible.

10. In a recent introduction to early Irish saints' Lives the present writer made the following remarks about the style of the roughly mid-eighth-century so-called 'First' Life of Saint Brigit or *Vita I S. Brigidae*: "to me the overall effect is rather reminiscent of the terse, plain narrative typical of early Irish sagas, and I suspect that the First Life's author is, at least in part, attempting to capture this quality in Latin. Certainly the opening sentence of this work is deliberately close to a common opening formula in vernacular saga" (McCone, 1984b, 36). This last point was elaborated as follows in a footnote: "*fuit quidam vir nobilis, Laginensis genere, nomine Dubtachus* clearly echoes the very common opening formula 'there was a noble (*vel. sim.*) X over/among people Y, Z his name' of secular saga right down to the initial verb normal in Irish but a good deal less so in Latin. Typical enough saga examples are *buí rí amra airegda for Érinn, Eochaid Feidlech a ainm* "there was a wondrous, noble king over Ireland, E.F. his name" (*Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, ed. Knott, 1936) and *boí coire féile la Laigniu, Buchat a ainm* (*Esnada Tige Buchet*, ed. Greene in *Fingal Rónáin and Other Stories*, 1955), "there was a cauldron of generosity among the Leinstermen, B. his name"." To these may be added *boí ríg-briugu amrae la Laigniu, Mac Da Thó a ainm* "there was a wonderful chief hospitaller among the Leinstermen, Mac Da Thó his name" (see McCone, 1984c, 4).

These views cannot be sustained because they ignore highly germane Latin scriptural data. Hebrew, like Irish, was a fundamentally verb-initial language, and this background allied with the flexible nature of Greek word order to produce plentiful initial verbs in both Septuagint and New Testament. Given the respect accorded to the sacred text and the reasonable flexibility of Latin word order, it is no surprise to find a strong inclination to place the verb at or near the head of its clause in the Vulgate, particularly those parts of the Old Testament translated by Jerome from the Hebrew. Formulae corresponding closely to the hagiographical one just cited may introduce episodes in both the Old and New Testaments, e.g. *fuit eo tempore vir quidam de monte Ephraim nomine Michas* "there was at that time a certain man of Mount Ephraim named Micah" (Jud. 17:1), *fuit vir quidam Levites habitans in latere montis Ephraim* "there was a certain Levite man living on the side of Mount Ephraim" (Jud. 19:1), *erat autem vir quidam de Saraa et de stirpe Dan nomine Manue* "there was, however, a certain man of Zorah of the stock of Dan named Manoah" (Jud. 13:2) and *fuit in diebus Herodis regis Iudaeae sacerdos quidam nomine Zaccharias de vice Abia* "there was in the days of Herod king of Judaea a certain priest named Zacharias of the course of Abia" (Luke 1:5). Accordingly there can be little doubt that the opening formula of the First Life of Brigit (cf. the similar *fuit vir vite venerabilis, Colmanus nomine, de nobile gente Hybernie, id est de Nepotibus Neill*; Plummer, 1910, I 258) was primarily derived from the Bible. Indeed, the simple Latin prose style of this Life as a whole is highly reminiscent of, and was presumably consciously modelled upon, normal Vulgate narrative in both the Old and New Testaments. According to Schökel, "the Hebrew phrase, because of the simplicity of syntactical articulation and the scarcity of adjectives and adverbs, is customarily short. Only a few oratorical texts resort to an elaborate

phrasing, with subordinate clauses (a good example is Deut. 8:7-18). Likewise, the best Hebrew narrative advances in a succession of brief phrases" (Alter and Kermode, 1987, 167). Similar qualities are still quite apparent in the narrative of the Vulgate translation, the terse and formulaic prose of which stands in marked contrast to the elegant and elaborate periods of Jerome's own prologues to the various books.

It has usually been assumed that the similar vernacular formula used to introduce sagas is of oral native provenance and may even be of Indo-European antiquity by virtue of comparability with the opening line of the Sanskrit Mahābhārata's Nala episode, *āsīd rājā Nalo nāma Vīrasenasuto balī* "there was a king named Nala, strong son of Vīrasena", and so on. However, there now appears to be some possibilty of biblical influence. Regardless of whether conscious imitation of or mere coincidence with a scriptural pattern is involved, the parallel must have been apparent to monastic men of letters.

11. The same would presumably hold for the brisk and relatively unadorned style of much early Irish vernacular narrative with its tendency to repeat with only minor grammatical modifications a given phrase linked to a particular action or situation, e.g. *'Ced sliab inso thall?' ol Cú Chulaind. 'Sliab Monduirnd' ol int ara. 'Tíagam co rísam' ol Cú Chulaind. Tíagait íarum co rráncatar. Iar ríchtain doib int slébe . . .* "'What mountain is that yonder?' said Cú Chulainn. 'Mount M.' said the charioteer. 'Let us go until we reach (it)' said Cú Chulainn. They go then until they reached (it). After the reaching by them of the mountain . . ." (*Táin*[1] ll. 691-5). Similar repetitions are common in the Old Testament, e.g. "Samson therefore went down into Timnath and, seeing there a woman of the daughters of Philistia (*descendit igitur Samson in Timnatha, videnque ibi mulierem de filiabus Philistim*), he went up and told his father and mother, saying 'I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines (*vidi mulierem in Timnatha de filiabus Philistinorum*) whom I ask that you get for me as wife'" (Jud. 14:1-2). General features of this sort are, of course, widespread in plain narrative genres, whether oral or literate, and are, for instance, abundant in early Indian Brāhmaṇic prose or the Homeric poems of ancient Greece. There is thus no particular reason to assume deliberate imitation of the Bible rather than more or less coincidental similarity in this area. Nonetheless, the fact remains that these rather extensive stylistic parallels with Latin scriptural narrative were at least liable to be appreciated by medieval Irish monastic authors.

In Thurneysen's opinion saga narrative was originally in prose only, although even in the older extant versions this might be interspersed with poetic passages of the rhetorical or rhyming syllabic type discussed earlier (1921, 53-9). The language of this prose is "full of Latin loanwords, which had spread from the monasteries and often already undergone significant changes in meaning . . . Thus the older narrators of about the eighth century speak the christianised language of their time: a tradition first begins here with the writing down of the sagas. The style of the prose sagas altered greatly over the centuries. The oldest consist of short, unconnected, note-like sentences. And since some derive from the manuscript of Druim Snechta . . ., which in part actually does contain mere notices of sagas, one could suppose that the oral narrators had always been fuller. However, other texts that do not spring from this manuscript show precisely the same style, e.g. "Cú Roí's Death"

. . . or "Liadain and Curithir". The finished sagas too, such as "The Cattle-raid of Cooley", . . . hardly diverge. It seems, then, that tales really were so narrated in the earlier period. Pauses in these swiftly progressing, cracking narratives are created on the one hand by the conversations, which are often rendered very completely, and on the other by the descriptions, over which there is an inclination to linger. Gradually the language becomes more connected, e.g. in Fled Bricrenn . . . There is also a tendency, as already mentioned, to adorn the descriptions rhetorically. This rhetorical style spreads in the eleventh century to narrative passages, cf. the more recent episodes in the "Cattle-raid of Cooley" . . ., and the later redactor of this saga at the beginning of the twelfth century has extended this style over the whole lengthy narrative as well as the saga Mesca Ulad" (1921, 59-60).

Thurneysen is doubtless justified in viewing this pleonastic narrative style prone to alliterative pairings of epithets and so on as a relatively late outgrowth of certain elaborate types of description in the sagas, and much else in this characteristically shrewd analysis is similarly convincing. However, the attempt to differentiate chronologically between the less and more continuous narrative modes does seem to have combined with Thurneysen's severely qualified connection of the former with abridgement to encourage Murphy's misapprehensions (ch.1, 3), about "the poorly-narrated manuscript versions noted down by monastic scribes as a contribution to learning rather than to literature" (1961, 8). Pursuant to his hypothesis that *Immram Brain* is "compounded of fresh composition and traditional oral narrative" Mac Cana is at once more discriminating and more ambitious in comparing two passages from the beginning and end of this text: "the contrast is obvious: in the first a remarkably mature prose which links sentences and varies their length and syntax so as to create an easy, rhythmical style; in the second the blunt, unvaried prose which is found in *Compert Con Culainn* and spasmodically throughout the early literature. Now this may be nothing more than an instance of the diversity of styles which is comprehended within the succinct prose of Old Irish saga. On the other hand, it is equally possible that the first passage is stylistically free because it is a freshly composed introduction to the following verse while the second is stylistically bound because it is a précis of an episode from traditional *echtra* literature" (1972, 114). Few would quarrel with Mac Cana's stylistic sketch of the passages in question and others like them or be surprised by his aesthetic reservations about the blunt, laconic style. However, of the two explanations offered for this contrast the former is surely more attractive than the latter, subsequently made to support questionable inferences about the composition of *Immram Brain*.

It can hardly be denied that early Irish saga narrative, like that of the Old Testament, is generally uncluttered and fast moving. In practice, this movement can be achieved either in a staccato or a legato manner, so to speak, or for that matter by virtually endless combinations of the two. *Compert Con Culainn* with its preponderance of short, sharp sentences does indeed verge markedly towards the staccato end of the scale, but still does not eschew snatches of connected prose, static description and *retoiric*. Other tales like the first recension of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* or *Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó* display all manner of fluctuation between or within different sections. It seems clear that there was nothing approaching a significant chronological or generic divide in this supple stylistic continuum. In this context individual preference for comparative homogeneity or degrees of greater variety in the basic narrative medium may well have been paramount.

In addition to the interplay of these staccato and legato effects, the basic progression of the plot was liable to be articulated by alternations between narrative and dialogue. Although at least some dialogue is normally present, its proportion to direct narrative varies greatly from text to text, authorial inclination presumably again playing a significant role alongside exigencies of plot. Whether smooth, abrupt or somewhere in between, both narrative and dialogue tend to be quite plain when primarily intended to advance the plot, but both are susceptible of considerable elaboration in order to slow down or even halt the action at crucial points. In straight narrative this is usually accomplished by detailed catalogues of people or by minute and often pleonastic prose descriptions of persons, places, objects or occasions ornamented in varying degrees by parallelism and alliteration, but in dialogue the rhetorics and rhyming syllabic verse discussed earlier are the standard devices.

Biblical parallels for poetically adorned speech and dialogue have already been considered, and it remains to note that static descriptions also play a prominent part on occasion in Old Testament narrative. Notable instances include the relatively brief accounts concerning Noah's ark and the entry into it (Gen. 6:14-6 and 7:13-6), the long descriptions of the construction of the sanctuary and ark of the covenant (Exod. 36-9), of the building of Solomon's temple and palace (1/3 Kgs. 6-7) and of the sumptuous setting of the king's feast at the beginning of Esther, the catalogue enumerating the Israelites by tribe (Num. 1:19-46), the list of David's mighty men, which contains some narrative embellishment (2 Sam./Kgs. 23:8-39), and that of Solomon's princes (1/3 Kgs. 4:2-19) followed by a description of the prosperity of that proverbially wise and just monarch's kingdom and household (20-8).

Such descriptive devices are, of course, quite widespread in different narrative traditions, being prominent in the Homeric epics for example. Consequently their frequent occurrence in early Irish saga hardly needs to be ascribed to imitation of biblical models, although some influence from that quarter can by no means be ruled out.

Catalogues of varying extent and adornment are quite common in early Irish saga, some particularly striking instances involving the descriptive enumeration of warriors by question and answer prior to a great battle. Good examples include the mere inventory of the muster of the Ulstermen in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*[1] 3454-97, the slightly more descriptive list of the practitioners of reaving (*díberg*) in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* pars. 41-3, the elaborate and alliterative question and answer account of *Tochim na mBuiden* or 'the march of the companies' at *Táin*[1] 3544-3870, and the extraordinary description of the inmates of the hostel in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* pars. 75-140, which is of the same type, but with the additional feature of a considerable amount of *retoiric*, and actually takes up about half of the story. The physical beauty, fine clothes and other accoutrements of men and women either individually or in groups are often dwelt upon (e.g. *Scéla Cano* 27-37). Once again *Togail Bruidne da Derga* provides a striking example in the extremely elaborate description of Étaín as encountered by her husband-to-be king Eochaid at the beginning of the tale. This includes a long sequence of similes applied to her features from the hair on her head down to her feet that is quite reminiscent of the less extended description of the king's beloved in the reverse direction at the beginning of the seventh chapter of the Song of Songs. Descriptions of fine buildings (e.g. *Táin Bó Fraích*, par. 7), festive occasions (e.g. *Serglige Con Culainn*, par. 1), the

prosperous reigns and realms of just kings (e.g. *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, par. 17, and *Mesca Ulad* ll. 130-5) and so on also occur.

It can thus be seen that the early Irish saga writer had a considerable array of narrative or descriptive devices and styles at his disposal. These could enter into countless combinations calculated to produce many different immediate and overall effects. Thus in the relatively short *Compert Con Culainn* the plot unfolds with appealing swiftness and directness by means of rather pithy prose and dialogue with the odd brief description or rhetoric thrown in, while *Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó* progresses purposefully but less rapidly by lacing its straightforward narrative with brief descriptions, a sizeable rhymed syllabic poem and a dramatic sequence of verbal confrontations culminating in the encounter between Cet and Conall, which is heightened by two short rhetorics. Other authors, particularly of longer narratives, often tend towards more variation of style and tempo. For example, in the first third of *Táin Bó Fraích* the plot is repeatedly interrupted and overshadowed by a string of elaborate prose descriptions presumably intended to build up tension in anticipation of the meeting between the hero and the woman he seeks (par. 13), whereafter the narrative proceeds more quickly but still with considerable descriptive embellishment. *Scéla Cano* makes liberal use of descriptive passages in its direct narrative and of rhymed syllabic verse in its extensive dialogues, while *Immram Brain* consists essentially of two large balancing gems of lyrical and prophetic syllabic poetry in a slim prose setting. Finally, the extraordinary proliferation of elaborate prose descriptions and rhetorics in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* help to make it arguably the most majestic and monumental of all extant early Irish sagas.

These few examples from a vast corpus should give some idea of the enormous technical and stylistic variety and sophistication of early Irish narrative literature. This rich tapestry urgently needs studying as an integrated phenomenon in its own right rather than as a more or less haphazard patchwork to be rudely unstitched in the search for 'original' constituents. Furthermore, those prone to stress the paramount role of oral tradition in the moulding of this material are challenged to find a comparable narrative complex in a demonstrably genuine oral milieu as opposed to a presumed one surviving only in writing. Unless or until this challenge is met, it must be accepted that Latin literary models, especially the Bible, are likely to have played a significant role in the evolution of early medieval Irish vernacular narrative style and method as we know them from monastic pens. In view of the ultimate dependence of writing upon speech, native oral modes presumably also played a role that we can now hardly assess. In the perspicacious words of James Carney concerning the overall situation, "early Irish saga literature shows in its vocabulary that it was given its present form well within the Christian period. Without any doubt this literature was based in part upon an oral tradition going back to the remote pre-Christian past. But the traditional element is often a mere nucleus because the Christian authors, in presenting the pre-Christian past, drew not only on native material but upon their total literary experience. This experience included a direct knowledge of a certain range of Latin literature . . ., a knowledge of the scriptures, of apocryphal works, and the Fathers of the Church" (1955, 321).

12. In the field of Old Norse literature Carol J. Clover refers to "the dramatic reaction, in the mid-1960s, against the methodological and ideological conservatism of saga scholarship. The collaborative volume *Norrøn fortællekunst* . . . distin-

guished itself from earlier literary histories in three important ways: (1) in its deemphasis of what are conventionally viewed as the "main" genres (family and kings' sagas) and its corresponding emphasis of such neglected genres as saints' lives and learned history writing; (2) in its effort to obliterate the traditional sharp distinction between "native" and "foreign" or "learned" literature; and (3) in its general assumption that the medieval Icelanders were considerably more conversant with, and indebted to, contemporary European culture, or sectors of it, than traditional scholarship has been inclined to allow . . . If the earlier generation of scholars thought of "influence" as involving occasional bits of foreign matter or ideology inserted into an essentially native form, the new Europeanists are more inclined to see them as elements integrated in a whole that itself owes European debts: an intellectual debt to medieval theology and a formal debt to medieval historiography. In the meantime, the list of suspected foreign debts, large and small, continues to grow" (1985, 251). These characteristics are eminently applicable to the current debate about medieval Irish literature, and it says much for the backward-looking isolationism of the post-war nativist school that both Carney's insights and major new developments in a cognate discipline, not to mention the evidence of the native sources themselves, should have been resisted or ignored for so long.

CHAPTER THREE

'Pagan' myth and Christian 'history'

1. Until quite recently there has been a somewhat strange tendency in medieval Irish studies to restrict terms such as 'myth', 'mythical', 'mythology' or 'mythological' to the pagan past or assumed pagan survivals in the literary record of the early Christian period. Those prone to view early Irish tradition in dualistic terms could then conveniently contrast this component with what Mac Neill has appropriately dubbed 'synthetic history', namely the elaborate framework of genealogy, chronology and narrative devised by monastic men of letters and their associates from ecclesiastical and other sources. Subsequently, however, O'Rahilly's term 'pseudo-history' has generally been preferred with mischievous consequences, implying as it does an opposition both to 'real' traditions or myths on the one hand and to reliable history on the other. As a result these impressive medieval endeavours have, for the most part, come to be denied any real significance and dismissed as a mere distorting layer of clerical invention to be peeled away to get a better idea of the pagan foundations deemed to matter. Hence the commonly applied dichotomy in Irish studies between mythology and pseudohistory, the former being seen as essentially pagan and genuine, the latter as basically Christian and somehow bogus. Like chalk and cheese they appear not to mix well, and textual omelettes suspected of containing pseudohistorical or other literary impurities are for unscrambling in search of unadulterated pagan flavours rather than for straightforward consumption.

A notable application of this procedure is O'Rahilly's uncontrolled intuition against all the evidence of the text itself that "the story of Buchet and Ethne was in an earlier form a partial version of what was perhaps the most popular of all myths among European peoples, the myth of the Rival Wooers. Originally Buchet (alias Cathaer Már) had as consort the goddess Ethne, who in time wearied of him and fell in love with the Hero (here Cormac), who made the difficult journey to the Otherworld to win her. Sometimes, in order to gain sympathy for the change of affections of the faithless wife (as she appears to be), we are told that she was being ill-treated or persecuted by her cruel husband, as when Branwen in the *Mabinogi* is said to have been degraded to the position of kitchen-wench in the court of Matholwch. We have a trace of this in *Esnada Tige Buchet*, in which Ethne is reduced to performing the most menial tasks before Cormac carries her off; but

Ethne's lowly state is represented not as an indignity inflicted upon her by her husband but simply as resulting from Buchet's unmerited impoverishment. Moreover, Ethne is no longer Buchet's wife, but only his devoted foster-daughter. (There is mention of Buchet's wife, but significantly she gets no name.) Of the original enmity between Buchet and Cormac little or nothing remains, for they are no longer rivals. With the passage of time myths as a rule become more and more rationalized and humanized, and those relationships which would offend the conscience of humanity tend to be modified or suppressed; but such processes have seldom been carried out so thoroughly as in *Esnada Tige Buchet*" (1952, 19). In similar but vaguer vein Mac Cana has recently referred to "literatures born of mythologies" and to Fothad Canainne as "a figure still trailing behind him the remnants of a complex mythology" (1987, 75 and 78), and elsewhere states of the tale *Cath Maige Tuired* that "its mythological importance is obvious, its meaning rather less so" (1983, 58).

In view of such attitudes the shortage of serious attempts to appreciate synthetic history as an integrated and meaningful ideological construct in its own right is hardly surprising, even though various versions of it influence or inform a great deal of extant medieval Irish material. The main barriers have been firstly the use of 'mythology' as a kind of smokescreen to obscure or evade the issue of the meaning of texts as actually transmitted and secondly a preoccupation with questions of origin and classification irrelevant to their compilers. However, Mark Scowcroft's recent remarks about the relatively late extant recensions of the full and ever-expanding manual of synthetic Irish history known as *Leabhar Gabhála* suggest a way forward out of this pseudo-modernist morass: "this fusion of fact and fiction, of native and Latin (pagan and Christian) tradition furnishes the Irish *literati* with their own mythology - a history and re-enactment of the order of things - and with a historical framework for the sagas, the annals and the chronicles" (1987, 81), to which might be added hagiography, genealogy, topography, gnomic literature and law.

2. A brief synopsis of relevant ancient, medieval and modern attitudes to and theories about myth seems desirable at this point to help elucidate the relationship between myth, allegory and history in a medieval Christian Irish context. It will be argued that the extant record presents us with a dynamic and thoroughly syncretistic early Irish history-cum-mythology geared to a contemporary symbiosis between the intermingled aristocracies of Church and State (cf. McCone, 1984b, 56-9).

Jean-Pierre Vernant begins a lucid discussion of successive theories of mythology by showing how the rise of philosophical reasoning in ancient Greece caused the meanings of the originally more or less synonymous *mythos* and *logos* 'utterance, account' to diverge as the latter became increasingly associated with fact and logical reasoning, thus tending to shift the former's meaning towards the other end of the spectrum. Thus "the concept of myth that we have inherited from the Greeks belongs, by reason of its origins and history, to a tradition of thought peculiar to Western civilization in which myth is defined in terms of what is not myth, being opposed first to reality (myth is fiction) and, secondly, to what is rational (myth is absurd)" (1980, 186). These notions are, of course, still central to the word's meaning in normal English usage, and this no doubt explains a certain western reluctance to call biblical and other Judaeo-Christian narratives 'mythical', thus giving the term automatic pagan connotations. However, this squeamishness is unnecessary,

since the evolving study of mythology has increasingly sought to invest 'myth' and its derivatives with an objectivity appropriate to scientific terms precisely by eschewing gratuitous assumptions about the incredibility, irrationality or immorality of such material.

A mythological corpus may, of course, retain all or much of its authority and appeal despite social and intellectual progress away from the modes of thought and the values embodied by it, but this divergence is likely to give rise to discomfort and embarrassment about elements now felt to be absurd, unedifying or both. Allegory is the classic response to such perceptions and basically provides a strategy for transposing or translating myths into more rational or morally acceptable terms by the application of quite arbitrary symbolic values to their constituents. The allegorical approach was applied by later Greek philosophers and critics to the Homeric poems and other mythical narratives, and also found limited favour with pre-Christian rabbinic exegetes of the Old Testament. These traditions converged in the philosophising Old Testament exegesis of Philo Judaicus (1st. cent. A.D.), who in turn influenced the Christian fathers Clement of Alexandria (2nd. cent.) and Origen (3rd. cent.). According to G.W.H. Lampe "it is true that rabbinic allegory tends to be less fully developed and elaborate (indeed, fanciful) than that of the Alexandrian Jewish tradition represented by Philo; but the difference lies in content rather than in method. Paul's application of the Deuteronomic prohibition against muzzling the ox to the Church's duty to maintain its ministers is a good example of the rabbinic use of allegory. Philo, on the other hand, is concerned, like some of the Hellenistic interpreters of Homer, to read a system of philosophy into the Scriptures and in so doing to eliminate apparent obscurities and morally offensive passages. His idea that Abraham's wanderings signify the progress of the soul towards contemplation, and that the wives of the patriarchs stand for moral virtues, has no parallel in Palestinian Judaism" (1975, 160).

Esteem for the allegorical method spread from Alexandrian to western biblical exegesis. Indeed, such major and prolific sixth- and seventh-century writers as Pope Gregory the Great and Isidore of Seville were enthusiastic allegorists as well as being enormously influential in early medieval Irish learned circles. As a method of accommodating the Old Testament to Christian purposes allegory coexisted and was often combined with historical typology, a procedure rooted "in the conviction that the divine purposes of history are revealed in a pattern of promise and fulfilment, and that this means that the Old Testament can in principle be applied at every point to Christ and the Church" (ibid., 162). Allegory has rightly been considered methodologically unsound by modern students of myth and literature, who reject its ultimately arbitrary interpretations and in any case tend to be concerned with the broadly contemporary meaning of texts rather than with how subsequent generations chose to harmonize them with their own ideas and circumstances. Nevertheless, the fact remains that typology and, above all, allegory were of cardinal intellectual importance throughout the Middle Ages in Europe, including Ireland: "the resources of philology were slight, being limited almost exclusively to traditional collections of *onomastica sacra*, consulted for the etymology of proper names. The important place occupied by allegory, however, in every branch of thought provided the exegesis of this period with its dominant orientation" (Leclercq in Lampe (ed.), 1975, 183-4). Following Baumgarten (1987), it has already been argued (ch. 2, 9) that understandable modern disapproval of medieval etymo-

logical method should not be allowed to prevent proper appreciation of its major role in early Irish exposition and composition. It would be similarly unwise to dismiss out of hand the possible relevance of allegorical and typological factors, both quite liable to be linked with etymologies, to a written Irish narrative literature that was being produced in monasteries at a time when allegory, typology and etymology were very much in vogue. A test case will be considered later, but first a number of more modern treatments of myth merit attention.

3. The so-called 'solar' mythology developed by Max Müller and other romantics in the later nineteenth century sought by etymological and other means to rediscover the original 'natural' meanings of myths held to have been subsequently obscured by the perversion of language. Thus 'restored', myths were, in effect, reduced to various figurative ways of talking about the weather and natural phenomena. Although this absurd theory was soon wittily debunked by scholars like Andrew Lang (cf. Thompson, 1946, 371-5), O'Rahilly's *Early Irish History and Mythology* testifies to its continuing influence as late as the 1940s in Celtic studies at least.

Scholars such as Lang himself and J.G. Frazer, author of the monumental *Golden Bough*, adopted an evolutionary approach to myths, which were primarily valued as survivals of a savage stage of human intellectual development governed by emotion and association rather than reasoned analysis or as evidence for incipient progress away from that primitive condition. It was in this vein that Murphy could regard Irish saga as "something unique in European tradition, a rich mass of tales depicting a West-European barbaric civilization as yet uninfluenced by the mighty sister-civilization of Graeco-Roman lands. Likewise, the lover of literature, having exhausted the possibilities of the maturer literatures of other countries, finds in Irish storytelling something to delight him from the youth of the world, before the heart had been trained to bow before the head or the imagination to be troubled by logic and reality" (1961, 5). Such assumptions clearly preclude analysis aimed at revealing deliberately articulated and often complex constellations of meaning in mythological narratives.

The historico-philological approach developed in Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries owed much to Lachmannian principles of stemmatic textual criticism and accordingly concentrated upon establishing a myth's chronological and taxonomic provenance in the hope of identifying the historical events or circumstances responsible for shaping it. As its title suggests, *Early Irish History and Mythology* was heavily influenced by this method, which O'Rahilly astoundingly sought to combine with concepts derived from 'solar' mythology. Accordingly the first half or so of this book squanders the author's matchless knowledge of the medieval sources upon a futile attempt to manufacture pre-Christian Irish history, especially that pertaining to alleged invasions, from the manifestly tendentious claims of the much later literary record, while the second half suddenly and without explanation renounces this line to insist with equal fervour that various major figures in the material originated as cosmic deities devoid of historicity. The end result of this intuitive eclecticism is an erudite but alarmingly capricious and idiosyncratic treatment that continues to cast a steadily fading shadow over sections of early Irish studies.

Whether naturalist, evolutionist or historicist, each of these three basic approaches to myth shares a primary concern with speculation about unattested

earlier stages or even origins rather than with interpretation of the material as actually transmitted.

They are also indiscriminately reductionist, seeking to strip everything down to certain aprioristic essentials. A similar objection applies to various psychological explanations of myth in terms of universal symbols, whether linked to basic Freudian impulses or to the Jungian archetypes and other transcendental notions so influential in and through the comparative religious and mythological studies of scholars like Kerényi and the more empirical Eliade. The invocation of questionable general hypotheses about the human psyche to account for myth seems to promise little more than an explanation of *obscurum per obscurius*, and its results have proved too vague and repetitious to be analytically useful. Various theories along these lines have been conveniently summarized and criticised by G.S. Kirk (1974, 63-82), and their impact upon Irish studies has been no more than tangential, although Tomás Ó Cathasaigh (1977) and others have made occasional and mostly non-committal references to certain of Eliade's generalizations where appropriate.

The Austrian anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski's internment on the Trobriand Islands during the First World War led to an epoch-making study of a so-called 'primitive' society in all its integrated aspects, including mythology. Thus was born the so-called 'functionalist' approach to myth particularly influential in British anthropology and associated with names such as Evans-Pritchard and Radcliffe-Brown. This school saw the primary role of myth as, in Vernant's words, "to reinforce the social cohesion or functional unity of a group by presenting and justifying the traditional order of its institutions and modes of conduct in a codified form that is agreeable to listen to and easy to remember and transmit from one generation to the next" (1980, 221). In this way myths, rituals, customs and institutions are integrated with and corroborate each other in a given socio-cultural matrix, the primary function of myth being to provide explanations of and authority for things being the way they are.

4. This view appears quite valid as far as it goes, but certain inadequacies have been pointed out by the founders and adherents of various types of structuralist analysis. Common to these is the claim (1) that the formal properties of mythical discourse are amenable to analysis in terms of notions like binary opposition and the neutralization or 'mediation' (cf. Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 45-6) of contrasts developed in structural linguistics and (2) that myth need not be merely a static aetiological model of and charter for reality as perceived by a given group but can also be a dynamic intellectual instrument for viewing and discussing various aspects of this from positive or negative standpoints.

Structuralists tend to regard the message of a given narrative, whether mythical, literary or both, as being encoded in what may be a many-levelled interplay of functions and symbols, the values of which are to be deciphered by the classic strategem of establishing a grid of oppositions and working from the known to the unknown. The quest for pertinent data may, of course, extend beyond the text itself to the investigation of further texts, artefacts, institutions, beliefs and so on from the relevant socio-cultural environment.

Georges Dumézil's particular application of early structuralist principles to comparative Indo-European mythology has exercised considerable influence upon Celtic studies, and has been briefly touched upon in chapter one. Dillon expressed his

approval as early as 1947 (19-20), and the Rees brothers' book *Celtic Heritage* (1961) constitutes an influential but unduly enthusiastic attempt at a full-scale application. The injection of Dumézilian insights into medieval Irish studies has had the beneficial effect of focusing attention upon the myths or tales as meaningful narratives expounding various aspects of a pervasive ideology. On the debit side, however, the fact that the tripartite ideology in question was primarily seen as an Indo-European inheritance or survival meant that early Irish texts were still tending to be laid on an imported bed of Procrustes relating to their assumed past rather than their present. All too often scholars have been content to label a motif 'Indo-European' as if that were an explanation in itself and obviated the need for further discussion of its actual textual function.

In a classic presentation of the so-called 'formalist' approach to folk narrative Vladimir Propp (1958) has sought to base his analysis of certain Russian folktales upon a limited number of generally applicable *functions*. The basic means of isolating these is illustrated by the following four examples:

1. A tsar gives an eagle to a hero.
The eagle carries the hero away to another kingdom.
2. An old man gives Sucenko a horse.
The horse carries Sucenko away to another kingdom.
3. A sorcerer gives Ivan a little boat.
The boat takes Ivan to another kingdom.
4. A princess gives Ivan a ring.
Young men from the ring carry Ivan away to another kingdom.

As one can readily see, "both constants and variables are present in the preceding instances. The names of the dramatis personae change (as well as the attributes of each), but neither their actions nor functions change. From this we may draw the inference that a tale often attributes identical actions to various personages. This makes possible the study of the tale according to the functions of its dramatis personae . . . Function is understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action . . . Functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale" (ibid., 19-21). Some constituents in these sequences (e.g. tsar/old man/sorcerer/princess, eagle/horse/boat/young men from ring) may be interchanged without affecting the basic pattern observable throughout. As such they are isofunctional variables capable of being subsumed under a common heading or function (e.g. giver, transporter) and, in Ó Cathasaigh's words, "are related *paradigmatically*, that is, they are in a potential relation of *substitution*" (1977, 14). On the other hand, the various elements juxtaposed in a given narrative (e.g. tsar-gives-eagle-to hero, eagle-carries-hero-to another kingdom in 1) "are related *syntagmatically*, that is, their relationship is one of *opposition* and absolutely precludes substitution: it is actualized as a linear sequence of events in time and space" (ibid.). Once the relevant functions have been tagged with appropriate symbols, it becomes possible to follow Propp and represent narratives by formulae made up of these.

As in the brief examples given, the functions are organised into larger units called *moves*: "morphologically, a tale . . . may be termed any development proceeding from villainy . . . or a lack . . ., through intermediary functions . . . to a dénouement. Terminal functions are at times a reward . . ., a gain or in general the liqui-

dation of misfortune . . . This type of development is termed by us a move . . . Each new act of villainy, each new lack creates a new move. One tale may have several moves . . . One move may directly follow another, but they may also interweave . . . Special devices of parallelism, repetitions, etc., lead to the fact that one tale may be composed of several moves" (Propp, 1958, 92).

Some features of Propp's method have been adopted or adapted by various brands of structuralism. For instance, his notion of functions and moves has been considered applicable to a wide range of oral and literary discourse and was incorporated with some modification by Roland Barthes into his 'Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives' (1984, 79-124). Here the famous medieval Irish tale *Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó* will serve to illustrate some possibilities of analysis by moves (T_x = initiatory dilemma, * = resolution, a/b = bifurcation of an initiatory dilemma into two resolutions, . . . = suspension of disjunctive move until later). After a brief prologue (P) setting the scene, the initial lack in this tale (T_1) consists (a) of the simultaneous requests of the rulers of Ulster and Connacht for Mac Da Thó's peerless hound and (b) of its owner's dilemma. This is temporarily resolved by his wife's advice to offer it to both sides separately and invite them to his home on the same day to receive it. When the enemies from Ulster and Connacht arrive for a feast centring upon a magnificent pig (T_2), the question arises as to (a) who will win the hound and (b) who will carve the pig. After a series of verbal contests the Ulster hero Conall Cernach earns the privilege of carving. However, he gives the Connachtmen an insultingly small portion (T_3). In the battle begun to avenge this insult the Ulstermen are eventually victorious but the dog is slain (* for T_1a, T_2a, T_3). The dog's slayer, Fer Loga, seeks adventure (T_4) before returning home with gifts at the end of the tale. In formal terms we have:

P. T_1(a) . . . . . *
(b) . . . . . * T_2(a) . . . . . *
(b) . . . . . * T_3 . . . . . * T_4 . . . . . *

This analysis shows that the generally acknowledged excellence of this tale is due in no small measure to its structure. By resolving no less than three issues at once the great battle marks a fitting climax, while the narrative up to that point combines satisfaction at the periodic resolution of various difficulties with suspense concerning the postponed outcome of others (cf. Barthes, 1984, 117-21 on this property of disjunction). Coming as it does after a great watershed in the narrative, the Fer Loga episode appears as something of an anticlimax winding the story up but this too may have a deliberate purpose (see 12 below). That said, it must be admitted that these formalist insights have little direct bearing upon determination of meaning.

Proppian ascription of an identical underlying structure to two or more narratives with rather different surface features appears to be possible in the case of some Irish narratives, a notable application being Daniel Melia's treatment of the core of various Ulster death-tales (1978). To give a further instance, the divergent descriptions of Conaire's acquisition of the kingship in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, pars. 11-5, and the short saga *De Síl Chonairi Móir* can both be reduced to the following common set of what may for convenience be termed functions, bearing in mind the 'portmanteau' principle whereby a given function can sometimes open up into a series of subordinate functions (cf. Barthes, 1984, 102-4) : (a) death of old king,

(b) moves to determine successor, (c) wrong candidate, (d) help from supernatural parent, (e) people of Tara's hostility, (f) passing of test, (g) acceptance by people of Tara (cf. McCone, 1980, 142-5).

In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* the death of king Etirscél (= a) is followed by the mantic ritual of a *tairbfeis* or 'bull-feast' to divine the appearance of the future king (= b). The young Conaire's supernatural father tells him to present himself naked with a sling at Tara in conformity with the vision at the bull-feast (= d), but when he arrives the people of Tara express doubts about the validity of a vision showing one so manifestly under age (= c/e). However, Conaire responds to this challenge with an apposite assertion of his moral qualification for and hereditary right (as earthly son of Etirscél) to the kingship (= f) and is duly acknowledged by the people (= g). *De Síl Chonairi Móir* follows the death of Etirscél (= a) with a meeting between the Leinstermen and the Cenél Cuinn to appoint a successor by ordeal involving mounting a chariot drawn by unbroken horses, fitting a royal mantle therein and driving through the narrow gap between two stones to earn a screech of approval from the Fál or "stone penis (*ferp cluche*)" against his axle (= b). When Etirscél's slayer Lugaid Ríabderg fails these tests (= c), Conaire's supernatural mother Mes Búachalla advises him to go to Tara and assembles a host to assist him (= d). The people of Tara flee before them (= e), but Conaire passes the tests (= f) and the people of Tara duly submit to him as his father's successor (= g).

The fundamental similarities between these narratives are clearly important, but some significance presumably also attaches to the differences. It is no mere coincidence that the genealogically oriented *De Síl Chonairi Móir* emphasizes martial and (ritualized) sexual prowess as its hero's qualification for kingship whereas *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* emphasizes the more pacific attributes of generosity, wisdom and inheritance in line with its author's adverse attitude to the gratuitous violence of the *fían* (see ch. 9, 3 and 8). Likewise the surface differences are at least as important as the underlying similarities for determining the respective meanings of the Fer Loga episode and the story about Cú Chulainn's slaughter of the smith's hound (see 5 and 12 below).

In a review of Propp's work the most influential of modern structuralists in the field of myth, Claude Lévi-Strauss, pays tribute to its anticipation of such structuralist axioms as "the notion of an "initial situation"; the comparison of a mythological matrix with the rules of musical composition; the necessity of a reading that is at once "horizontal" and "vertical"; the constant use of the notion of a group of substitutions, and of transformations, in order to resolve the apparent antinomy between the constancy of the form and the variability of the content; the effort - at least sketched by Propp - to reduce the apparent specificity of functions to pairs of oppositions" (1978, 126-7). However, the problem lies in Propp's concentration upon form to the theoretical exclusion of content. As Lévi-Strauss puts it, "unless the content is surreptitiously reintegrated into the form, the latter is condemned to remain at such a level of abstraction that it neither signifies anything any longer nor has any heuristic meaning. *Formalism destroys its object.* With Propp, it results in the discovery that there exists in reality but one tale. Henceforth, the problem of explanation is only displaced. We know what *the tale* is, but as experience puts before us not an archetypal tale but a great number of concrete tales, we do not know how to classify them anymore. Before formalism, we were certainly

unaware of what these tales had in common. Since formalism, we have been deprived of any means of understanding how they differ" (ibid., 132-3).

In *The story of Asdiwal*, originally published in French in 1958 like the above review, Lévi-Strauss goes beyond functionalism by making the basic point that "the myth is certainly related to given facts, but not as a *representation* of them. The relationship is of a dialectic kind, and the institutions described in the myths can be the very opposite of the real institutions. This will always be the case when the myth is trying to express a negative truth" (1978, 172). His comprehensive analysis of the Asdiwal tale causes Lévi-Strauss "to draw a distinction between two aspects of the construction of a myth: the sequences and the schemata. The sequences form the apparent content of the myth, the chronological order in which things happen: the meeting of the two women, the intervention of the supernatural protector, the birth of Asdiwal, his childhood, his visit to heaven, his successive marriages, his hunting and fishing expeditions, his quarrels with his brothers-in-law, and so forth. But these sequences are organised on planes at different levels of abstraction in accordance with schemata, which exist simultaneously, superimposed one upon the other; just as a melody composed for several voices is held within bounds by two-dimensional constraints: first by its own melodic line, which is horizontal, and second by the contrapuntal schemata, which are vertical" (ibid., 161). The following sets are identified in this case: a geographic schema comprising journeys on a primary east-west and secondary north-south axis, a cosmological schema involving nether regions, earth, air, sky etc., a schema integrating both in terms of the contrasts high/low, land/water, mountain-hunting/sea-hunting, peak/valley, and finally a techno-economic schema reflecting "the economic cycle and the seasonal migrations of the native fishermen" (ibid., 164). These all combine in a global integration arrived at by contrasting "the initial state of affairs and the final, which together summarize its operational function" (loc. cit.). In this way, "having separated out the codes, we have analyzed the structure of the message. It now remains to decipher the meaning" (ibid., 165), a quest which leads to the consideration of some cognate material.

Lévi-Strauss's classic argument (e.g. 1972) that so-called 'savage' or 'primitive' thought, far from being irrational, is highly sophisticated and structured in the paradigmatic choice of content as well as in syntagmatic form, but along analogical rather than strictly logical lines, leads Vernant to conclude: "once rescued from the sphere of affective confusion and the spontaneity of fantasy . . ., the mythical symbol can be defined in terms of, on the one hand, the social conditions that affect it and, on the other, the rules of linguistics. Myth is no vague expression of individual feelings or popular emotions. It is an institutionalised system of symbols, a codified verbal behaviour which, like language, conveys various modes of classifying facts - by coordinating, grouping and opposing them, various ways of recognising both resemblances and differences, in short ways of organising experience. Thought takes shape by expressing itself symbolically in and through myth as it does in and through language" (1980, 222).

5. Since classic anthropological studies of myth by Lévi-Strauss and others have been based upon material gathered from various truly oral cultures, the question inevitably arises as to how far such methods are appropriate to the study of literary narratives. In the Irish context this issue has been largely evaded until late either by

the fatuous fiction that early Irish sagas are fundamentally oral compositions or by preference for the textual orientation of Dumézil's approach.

A similar problem regarding the literary nature of the sources for most extant Greek mythology has been more squarely faced. According to Vernant "we should note in this respect that Lévi-Strauss works on a body of oral stories that affords a very large number of variants. The nature of the material itself calls for a systematic comparison between the various stories to distinguish the formal features which reappear from one myth to another, whether the relationships involved are those of homology, inversion or permutation . . . The problem is quite different in the case of a great written work with a strong and elaborate structure . . . Here it is not a question of selecting as most important those elements that can also be found, in a more or less altered form, in other versions. Instead, the scholar must attempt an exhaustive analysis of the myth in all the detail of its textual form" (1980, 235). Moreover, "the myths from oral cultures have been collected by anthropologists without any historical perspective, in bulk, usually in fragmented and dispersed order, just as they have come to hand. The only way to deal with this seems to be as Lévi-Strauss does . . . In written literature, alongside data similar to and on the same level as oral myth, we also find grand general systematised constructions the sum total of whose different parts integrates into one unified message" (ibid. 238-9).

The relevance of these considerations to early Irish narrative is apparent from a number of recent studies. For instance, Ó Cathasaigh (1981 and 1983) has argued persuasively that two relatively long narratives previously dismissed by critics as aesthetically unappealing ragbags of ill coordinated episodes do, in fact, display a deliberate structure and thematic unity geared to the recurrent exploration of a central ideological concept from different angles. Thus *Cath Maige Mucrama* is seen as an interconnected series of tableaux depicting the widening effects of *lommrad* or 'denuding' so crucial to early Irish notions of sovereignty (see ch. 5, 2), while episode after episode of *Scéla Cano* exemplifies that most Christian of virtues *ainmne* or 'patience', which was likewise regarded as a desirable attribute of kings. The at first sight rambling and incoherent linear structures of these tales take on a significantly tighter aspect once this interplay of theme and variations is recognized, and one is reminded of the great Greek tragedian Euripides' play the *Troades*, the dramatic effect and moral message of which are conveyed by a sequence of loosely connected scenes depicting the cumulative horrors of war.

On the other hand, one can also find briefer independent narratives related to each other by 'homology, inversion or permutation'. A definitive brief study of this type is Lévi-Strauss' 'Four Winnebago myths' (1978, 198-210), in which three of the myths in question were identified as variants by permutation to produce somewhat different applications of a basic positive paradigm whereas the fourth presented a negative paradigm by inversion of key features found in the rest.

A similar argument has recently been made regarding *Aided Con na Cerda* (*Táin*' ll. 540-607), the end of *Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó* and *Aided Cheltchair Meic Uithechair* (McCone, 1984c). Each of these narratives involves the slaying of a ferocious hound taken to embody the martial spirit. In the first the precociously warlike child Sétantae kills the hound of Culann the smith in fair combat and earns his adult identity as Cú Chulainn or 'hound of Culann', the warrior hero *par excellence*, by temporarily replacing the dead hound as protector of Culann's

property until a whelp from its litter should be old enough to release him for still greater deeds of derring-do. In the second the mere charioteer Fer Loga slays Mac Da Thó's dog Ailbe from an advantageous position and goes on to get the better of the Ulster king Conchobar by attacking him from behind. Conchobar is forced to save his life by agreeing to let Fer Loga spend a year at his court being treated as a real warrior, the women of Ulster being obliged to regale him with a nightly refrain of 'Fer Loga is my darling'. Thereafter Fer Loga returns to Connacht to resume his proper profession. The Cú Chulainn story clearly involves the permanent and beneficial fusion of the hound's attributes with those of its slayer to produce the perfect warrior, but in the Fer Loga episode a series of permutations serves to impair the effects of killing the dog, rendering them transitory and largely bogus. Nevertheless, in both cases the slaughter has basically positive results for its perpetrator. In *Aided Cheltchair* by contrast the Ulster hero Celtchar's own hitherto faithful hound, the Dáelchú, runs amok and starts attacking his own people and their property with the result that Celtchar is forced to kill it but himself dies in the process. Here the effects of the slaughter on its perpetrator are manifestly negative and the basic pattern is inverted to represent the disastrous split of a previously twinned pair.

In this way different aspects of martial behaviour and the warrior's psyche are exemplified. Since *Aided Cheltchair* explicitly states that the three hounds in these tales were from the same supernatural litter and significant parallels can be adduced from Germanic, Indian and, above all, Greek literature (McCone, 1984c, 23-7, and 1987, 124-5), it seems probable that an appreciable part of this material has pagan, oral and even Indo-European roots. However, that is a far cry from alleging the mindless preservation of such traditions virtually intact in a literary milieu, and it will be suggested below that the Fer Loga episode is particularly suspect of having been a literary creation or at least adaptation in the clerical interest. These and many other surviving narratives bear abundant testimony to the ability of early Christian Ireland's monastically oriented men of letters to generate truly 'mythical' discourse in a functionalist or structuralist sense by the purposeful manipulation and supplementation of inherited material and conventions. If, however, the authors' outlook was not pagan, it is difficult to see how the myths they produced can be so described in terms of contemporary function.

According to Thurneysen, "after the old sagas were written down, these written texts constituted virtually the only foundation for the later remodellings and new creations. Certainly the sagas fixed in writing were also recited orally in the country by narrators and thereby probably altered in many ways. However, the later compilers and authors hardly ever relied upon this oral transmission, but based their work on the written texts still largely available to us, even if they sometimes incorporate other motifs from folktales. This can often be directly observed, since whole prose passages or expressions are taken over. The later development of saga is thus a markedly literary one, just as its language, too, often presents a remarkable mixture of old-fashioned and contemporary forms" (1921, 73). However, over-reaction against this arguably over-positivist approach has often resulted in the survival of various early Irish narratives in different versions being put down to the role of 'oral multiforms' or the like (see Slotkin, 1979; Nagy, 1983, 136).

Although these may presumably have been a factor in some cases, the value of such a hypothesis is questionable, since the evanescence of the alleged oral originals

renders it virtually uncontrollable, and any general theory along these lines must in any case be dismissed as untenable. For instance, oral multiformity can hardly account for the manifestly literary reworking of the first recension of the Táin, which itself from time to time explicitly notes diverse written versions (*slechtae*) in "other books" (Thurneysen, 1921, 101), to produce the version surviving in the Book of Leinster (ibid., 113-5) or for the demonstrably literate compilatory activity responsible for the extant *LU* version of *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dillon, 1941 and 1953, xi-xii). More to the point, different political biases or the like can often account for narrative variants as deliberate literary products without recourse to the fluidity of oral tradition, as has been shown by Ó Corráin (1986, 147-52) with reference to *Genemain Chormaic* and *Scéla Éogain ⁊ Cormaic*, but this aspect will be considered further in chapter ten. In short, the existence of such written variants does not constitute good evidence for the fundamental orality of the sources upon which they drew.

Finally, Thurneysen's above inference from the language of saga texts would square well with recent arguments that even in the eighth century Old Irish "may have been an artificially fostered learned and literary standard in competition with more mundane registers of speech which were rather more evolved in the direction of an early Modern Irish grammatical type", while Middle Irish is best seen "as a written hybrid between the time-honoured but increasingly outmoded Old Irish literary standard . . . and contemporary upper-register speech with a grammar ever closer to that of early Modern Irish" (McCone, 1987b, 181-2; cf. 1985, 101-3).

6. The boundary between history and myth is notoriously unstable: actual events may, with or without appreciable distortion, acquire a profound ideological significance redolent of myth, while fabrications, whether mythical or otherwise in origin, can come to be accepted as literal history. A detailed chronological frame of reference is usually regarded as symptomatic of a fundamentally historicising cast of mind. Since, however, even 'primitive' mythological systems can comprise sequences based upon logical (e.g. creation myths) or generational (e.g. deeds of fathers and sons) priority, this criterion is far from absolute. The basic point, surely, is that, once the focus is shifted from usually unanswerable and correspondingly unprofitable questions about origins to the issue of contemporary function, arguments of the 'myth or history?' type become largely irrelevant.

Much medieval Irish narrative purports and was presumably felt to be historical insofar as it involves characters or events fitted into an elaborate genealogical and chronological network reaching far back into the pre-Christian period. However, this hardly affects the essentially mythical function of much of this material. To all intents and purposes early Christian Ireland's mythology has been largely historicised and her history extensively mythologised, thus robbing the dichotomy of real significance. The resultant *senchus* is a web encompassing the bare topological, genealogical and chronological record, various types of prose or verse narrative, and law. In a paper entitled '*Senchas*: The Nature of Gaelic Historical Tradition' Byrne puts the nub of the matter thus: "however we may try to keep these four strands of myth, legend, pseudo-history and fiction separate in our own minds, they tend to be inextricably ravelled in the texts as we have them. Monastic influence, with its bent for historicism, has been at work on most extant versions of our myths and legends. The authors of the sagas were Christian and composed

consciously as literary artists. We cannot therefore excise obviously Christian references as mere 'monkish interpolations' in the hope of recovering a genuine sample of Celtic paganism" (1974, 149).

The question is whether this 'inextricable ravelling' is, so to speak, an accident of textual evolution through various conceivable stages between pagan orality and monastic literacy or rather reflects a more or less consistent ideology already fashioned by the creative fusion of various native and ecclesiastical elements. Such an ideology would presumably belong first and foremost to those responsible for the extant literature - a monastically oriented learned caste of Christian *áes dáno* born of the rapid assimilation of certain native professions to the clerical establishment (ch. 1, 10-11). Like clerics themselves, members of this variously nuanced learned class were, of course, firmly tied by birth, patronage or both to the lay aristocracy (ch. 10, 5), and this convergence of social and political interests is inevitably reflected in the literature.

7. Consequently, whatever native or traditional elements may have gone into its anatomy, early Irish mythology must first and foremost be described as a contemporary attribute of the aristocratic, syncretistic but predominantly Christian culture and associated ideology of those who produced the surviving written texts. From this perspective it immediately emerges that early Christian Irish mytho-history has a thoroughly biblical dynamic quite evident in origin tales of the Irish race, language and law that go back at least as far as the seventh and eighth centuries. Only the first of these categories will be considered here, since the linguistic aetiology has already been touched upon (ch. 2, 4) and the early Irish legal tradition will be the main concern of chapter four.

As intimated earlier (ch. 2, 2), there is good evidence that the Irish genealogical record had been linked to that of the Bible through an elaborate series of intervening generations by at least the second half of the seventh century. Thus two early alliterative poems (*Corp. Gen.* 1-7, cf. Ó Corráin, 1985, 56-7) trace the genealogy of famous prehistoric Leinster dynasts back to Adam via Riphath son of Gomer son of Japheth son of Noah (115b54-5, 116b23-4 and 46, cf. Gen. 10:1-3), while a closely related poem (*Corp. Gen.* 199-202) adopts a similar approach to the pedigree of the Munster king Cú-cen-máthair, during whose mid-seventh-century reign it was presumably composed. The last two works follow Japheth's name with a list of peoples descended from him, and according to Isidore of Seville (*Etym.* IX ii 37) these "inhabit the middle part of Asia to the North of Mount Taurus and all Europe as far as the British Ocean" (cf. Ó Corráin, 1985, 63-7).

An adjunct to, or outgrowth of, this genealogical framework was the scheme of invasions of Ireland that was to burgeon into the tangle of later recensions of the so-called *Lebor Gabála* or 'Book of Invasion(s)', which "grew up in response to a medieval problem - the vast blank separating Irish tradition from accepted world history - a problem it solved in a medieval way, allowing Christian universalism to multiply its patterns across an Irish stage. For the early Middle Ages, the Bible served as the primary source for ancient world history, the chronicles of Eusebius and Orosius as its principal compendia, harmonizations and continuations, and Isidore's *Etymologiae* as a general encyclopaedia. These works inspired not only the historiographical context and framework for *LG* but to a remarkable extent the content itself, which adapts even pagan theology and contemporary politics to biblical myths of origin, migration, and population" (Scowcroft, 1988, 63).

Moreover, early versions of this scheme go back at least as far as the eighth century on the evidence of *Sanas Cormaic* and Nennius. The former compilation of etymological material by Cormac mac Cuillenáin (+908) contains the laconic statement "read the Invasions of Ireland if you wish to know more fully" (*lege Gabála Érenn si uis plenius scire*, cf. Ó Corráin, ibid., 67), while versions of the early ninth-century British Latin work bearing Nennius' name briefly describe three invasions by Partholón, Nemed and the three sons of Míl (par. 13). The wanderings of these ancestors of the Gael and their forbears from Egypt to Ireland via Spain are then summarized on the authority of the "most learned of the Irish (*peritissimi Scottorum*)" as follows: "when the sons of Israel came through the Red Sea the Egyptians came and pursued and were drowned, as is read in the Law. There was a noble man from Scythia with a great family among the Egyptians and he was expelled from his kingdom and was there when the Egyptians were drowned, and he did not proceed to pursue the people of God. Those, however, who had survived formed a plan to expel him lest he beleaguer and occupy their kingdom, since their brave men had been drowned in the Red Sea, [he was the son-in-law of Pharaoh, that is the husband of Scotta, daughter of Pharaoh, from which Scotia is said to have been called] and he was expelled. But he wandered for forty two years through Africa, and they came to the altars of the Philistines and through the Salt Lake, and they came among Rusicada and the mountains of Azaria, and they came through the river Malva and they crossed through Mauritania to the columns of Hercules, and they navigated the Tyrrhenian Sea and reached Spain. And there they lived for many years and increased and multiplied exceedingly. And afterwards they came to Ireland one thousand and two years after the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea . . ." (par. 15). It thus appears that an Irish tradition along these lines was well established by the early ninth century.

The pre-Milesian occupations of Ireland in this account, synchronized from Partholón on "with the foundation of the great world-kingdoms of the Third Age: the Assyrian, the Median, the Persian, and the Alexandrian Greek" (Scowcroft, 1988, 29), are reminiscent of the recurrent themes of famine and journeying between Mesopotamia, Canaan and Egypt in the period of the Old Testament patriarchs, but the story of the exodus from Egypt and subsequent protracted wanderings to Ireland via Spain represents a particularly clear attempt to create suggestive parallels between Irish history and that of God's chosen people in the Bible. Further exploitations of this deliberate link in the field of law will be considered in the next chapter, and it has been plausibly suggested that the choice of Spain as a springboard was dictated by the doctrine of Isidore and Orosius that Ireland (*Hibernia*) lay opposite to and was visible from Spain (*Hiberia*, cf. Baumgarten, 1984, 189-203).

The old canonical section of *Auraicept na nÉces* describes Fénius Farsaid (clearly an eponym of the variety of Irish termed *Bélrae Féni*) in Egypt as the inventor of the Irish language (*Góedelc*) and his pupil Góedel son of Aingen son of Glúnfind son of Lámfind son of Agnoman as its eponymous first user (Ahlqvist, 1982, 47; ch. 2, 4). Allowing for an extra generation between Glúnfind and Lámfind represented by Feithiar/Etheoir (an alternative name for Góedel's father according to *Auraicept* 1,12) and for trivial fluctuation in the form of a couple of names, this is the genealogy of Glas or Góedel Glas in the Munster (115b47-9) and the first Leinster (148b47-9) poem mentioned above. This regrettably laconic verse thus makes it possible to trace Góedel's role as eponymous ancestor of the Irish (*Góedil*) and

the names of key ancestors linking him to biblical genealogies right back into the seventh century.

By the time of the historical poem *Can a mBunadas na nGáedel* ascribed to the monastic *fili* Máel Mura of Othain (+ 887) this older scheme of Góedel's immediate ancestors had been supplanted by a more effective one giving him a father Nél, son of the Scythian emigré to Egypt Fénius Farsaid, and a mother Scotta, daughter of Pharaoh. This had the advantage of supplying Góedel with a connection to Pharaoh's daughter even more impressive than that of Moses himself and of endowing three key terms relating to the Irish with eponymous ancestors. In the words of the poem, "the Féni are so called from Fénius, fame without reserve, the Gael were so called from Gáedel Glas, the Scots from Scotta" (*LL* 16025-6). Although the passage from Nennius above is sadly lacking in names, the Scythian origins of its hero suggest familiarity with this version in the early ninth century, and this would be corroborated by the apparent reference to Nél in the bracketed passage from an alternative manuscript source, if this could be shown to have been part of the original text. Be that as it may, the sequence (Góedel) Glas son of Nél son of Fénius son of Glúnfind etc. is already found in the second alliterative Leinster poem above (116b15-8), which may be as old as the seventh but in any case is hardly later than the eighth century. The bracketed section from Nennius may reflect a tradition that Nél or 'cloud' led the ancestors of the Gael from Egypt, the obvious trigger for this invention being Exodus 13:21-2: "and the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way (*Dominus autem praecedebat eos ad ostendendam viam per diem in columna nubis*) . . . The pillar of cloud never failed by day (*numquam defuit columna nubis per diem*)".

The complex question of later developments in the extant recensions of the *Lebor Gabála* is best left to specialists, but there can be no doubt about the repeated use of the Bible and other ecclesiastical material in the formation and elaboration of this fundamental historical doctrine from the seventh century onwards. One point worth noting in this respect is the genealogical recurrence of the name Éber. This, for instance, is the name of the invading son of Míl supposed to have possessed the southern half of Ireland (see below), while the second Leinster poem with the line Góedel < Nél < Fénius gives the name of Góedel's son as Éber (later Éber Scott) instead of the Fabail/Fáebar of the other two poems with the apparently older scheme. The appeal of Éber presumably resided in the fact that it was a reasonable eponym for Ireland's Latin name *Hibernia* (e.g. *Corp. Gen.* 186: *Éber a quo dicitur Hibernia ut alii putant*) in addition to being identical with the name of the eponymous ancestor of the Hebrews (e.g. Isidore, *Etym.* IX ii 5: *Heber nepos Arphaxat a quo Hebraei*, cf. Gen. 10:21f.).

Short of anticipating Mormon heterodoxy by actually claiming descent from a lost tribe of God's chosen people, early Christian Ireland's men of letters went as far as they could to equate their early history with that of biblical Israel by creating deliberate analogues or even, on occasion, contacts between the two. A good example of just how close they were capable of sailing to the wind in this respect is provided by Muirchú's late seventh-century account of the bargain struck by God's angel Victor with Patrick just before the latter's death: "the fourth petition, that all the Irish on the day of judgement be judged by you - thus it is said to the apostles 'and you shall sit and judge the twelve tribes of Israel' - so that you may judge those to whom you have been an apostle" (II, 4(3) in Bieler, 1979). Further examples of

such reasoning will be given below and in subsequent chapters, but one obvious implication was that God had selected Ireland as a promised land for her Gaelic conquerors as represented by the sons of Míl and their followers.

8. A good example of the standard scheme of five post-diluvian invasions is provided by the Tale of Tuán mac Cairill (*LU* ll. 1207-1355). According to Byrne "the study of Irish prehistory fascinated the medieval Irish, and over the centuries they elaborated a detailed history of the successive invasions of Partholón, Nemed, the Fir Bolg, the Tuatha Dé Danann, and the sons of Míl . . . preserved in the *Lebor Gabála* or 'Book of Invasions', which was being constantly brought out in new and revised editions until the end of the twelfth century . . . In the earliest version (already current in the eighth century) only the Connachta, together with their Uí Néill off-shoot, and the Eóganachta of Munster are descended from the two sons of Míl: the other peoples of Ireland are sharply distinguished from them and implicitly relegated to an inferior status. This reflects the widely held theory that the country was divided into two spheres of influence: Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga - the overlordships of Tara and Cashel respectively. Soon, however, other dynasties of local importance were provided by the synthetic historians with a line of descent from other sons of Míl, whose family underwent an alarming, if posthumous, increase. Even the more prominent of the Cruithin and Érainn were brought into the Milesian scheme, until only a few insignificant tributary tribes were still reckoned as 'Fir Bolg'" (1973, 9). Thus the narrative and genealogical dichotomy between the Fir Bolg and the sons of Míl expressed the crucial socio-political divide between the *aithech-thúatha* or subject peoples and the *sóer-chlanna* or free lineages.

Comparative evidence and some aspects of their literary representation suggest that a significant nucleus of the Túatha Dé Danann consists of thinly disguised pagan Irish deities (cf. Rees & Rees, 1961, 28-53; de Vries, 1961, 50-5, 77-8, 82, 100-2, 148-55), but in the developed scheme of invasions they stand between the Fir Bolg and the sons of Míl. The Túatha Dé's defeat of the Fir Bolg was ultimately responsible for the latter's servile condition in relation to their later Milesian masters. As told at the beginning of *Mesca Ulad* in *LL*, defeat of the Túatha Dé by the sons of Míl was followed by a vertical partition of Ireland, so to speak: "when the sons of Míl of Spain reached Ireland, their sagacity circumvented the Túatha Dé Danann so that Ireland was left according to the division of Amairgen Glúnmár son of Míl, since he was a chief poet (*rígfili*) and chief judge (*rígbrithem*). Consequently he divided Ireland in two and gave the half that was downwards to the Túath Dé Danann and the other half to the sons of Míl Espáine, to his own kindred. The Túath Dé Danann went into hills and *síd*-abodes so that the *síd*s below ground submitted to them". The next stage was a horizontal division between northern and southern halves: "the island of Ireland was divided between the two chief sons of Míl, namely Éremón and Éber, into two parts. Éber, moreover, received the southern part of Ireland, whereas Éremón received the northern part with the kingship" (*Corp. Gen.* 123, cf. Laud Genealogies, ed. Meyer, 1912, 291).

These displacements bring about the following series of binary social and spatial oppositions: UNFREE PEOPLES/FREE LINEAGES expressed by *Fir Bolg/ Túatha Dé*, SUBTERRANEAN (and immortal)/TERRESTRIAL (and mortal) realized as *Túatha Dé/Meic Míled* (who thus supplant the former as masters of

the *Fir Bolg*), and NORTHERN HALF (Leth Cuinn)/SOUTHERN HALF (Leth Moga) embodied by *Éremón/Éber*.

Whatever pre-Christian constituents may have gone into its makeup, the roughly ninth-century saga *Cath Maige Tuired* is firmly and explicitly anchored in a synthetic historical framework that is most apparent in the opening sections about the magical powers, four talismans and invasion of the Túatha Dé Danann. Consequently the tendency of some scholars to treat this narrative as almost pure pagan myth seems a trifle surprising. It tells how the Túatha Dé reached Ireland and defeated the Fir Bolg in the first battle of Mag Tuired but were subsequently oppressed by the Fomorians living beyond their borders until they finally routed the enemy in the second battle of that name under the leadership of their young king Lug. Since *túath Dé* 'God's people' normally refers to Israel in Old and Middle Irish (see *DIL* under *túath*(b)), the virtually regular use of Túath(a) Dé without the addition of Danann in this text (Gray, 1982, 117) looks like a deliberate ploy to associate these conquerors of Ireland with those of the biblical promised land. This will have been easy enough in a composition that makes no reference to the subsequent Milesian invasion, and the supernatural powers and immortality of the Túatha Dé Danann in any case rendered their status somewhat ambiguous. John Carey has identified a favourable doctrine that they were an antediluvian race unaffected by the Fall or the Flood and consequently immortal (1987, 76-9), while a hostile alternative view of them as demons is also attested (e.g. *Serglige Con Culainn* ll. 844-9). In the more euhemeristic context of invasion theory there may conceivably have been some perception or promotion of affinities with the similarly named Israelite tribe of Dan (*tribus Dan*), which was forced into the mountains (Jud. 1:34) but later took possession of four talismans and migrated to the edge of the territory to indulge in rather dubious religious practices in Judges 18.

In essence, however, their medial position allows them to be likened to Israel in relation to Fir Bolg and Fomorians but tc Canaan in relation to the Milesians (cf. Scowcroft, 1988, 38-9). In this respect it is worth noting that the Canaanites are first depicted as superhuman giants to the Israelites at Numbers 13, 31-3. Moreover, after going into the hills the Túatha Dé Danann "left five of their number over against each province increasing battles, conflicts, strife and combat among the sons of Míl" (*Mesca Ulad* ll. 9-12) rather as God informs the Israelites that the Canaanite remnants in their midst "shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you" (Jud. 2:3). At this level the *síd*-mounds and hills of the Túatha Dé Danann may have been seen as analogous to the heathen high places in the midst of Israel that are repeatedly referred to in the books of Kings (e.g. 2/4 Kgs. 17, 9-11).

Be that as it may, the Fir Bolg play a role more fully consistent with that of the partly massacred and partly subjugated Canaanites of the Old Testament, and this may help to explain their name. After claiming, probably correctly, that this term had replaced an older *Builg* attested in Nennius (par. 14), O'Rahilly adverts to the virtual unanimity of medieval Irish sources regarding its etymology: "in the various accounts of the invasion of the Fir Bolg more than one childish explanation is offered of their name, which is assumed to mean literally 'men of bags'" (1946, 46). In the Bible the first group of Canaanites to save their skins in the face of divinely ordained genocide were the Hivites of Gibeon by the ruse of pretending to have come from far beyond the boundaries of the promised land: "they did their work

wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks (*saccos veteres*) upon their asses, and wine bottles, rent and bound up (*utres vinarios scissos atque consutos*)" (Josh. 9:4). Having promised to spare the Gibeonites, the Israelites could not go back on their word after discovering their deceit, but Joshua pronounced "now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God" (9:23). Whatever its 'real' antecedents and etymology, the term Fir Bolg was undoubtedly understood by *literati* as 'men of bags/wineskins' (note *bolg* glossing Latin *uter* at Ml. 132^{c}7) and may well have been generated from this striking Old Testament episode as a means of endowing it with appropriately servile Canaanite connotations.

Once in possession of the promised land with its vassal pockets, God's people were engaged in more or less constant warfare with neighbouring peoples, especially the Philistines. During these protracted hostilities periods of subjugation alternated with periods of deliverance until king David finally subdued the Philistines. Like their Old Testament counterparts, the Fomorians in *Cath Maige Tuired* are neighbours who oppress and invade the Túath Dé until the latter are finally delivered by their king Lug, whose affinities with the biblical David will be considered in chapter six. Moreover, the Fomorians share with the Philistines a descent from Ham rather than Japheth (e.g. *LU* ll. 120-7, cf. 1 Chron. 1:12).

9. It thus appears that the broad outlines of pre-Christian Irish history were fashioned with the help of key features culled from the great biblical narrative up to the end of Kings. As with the Bible and Christian chronology, the coming of the new faith marked the great divide. Thus "Éremón, however, was the first of the Irish (*primus de Scotis*) to reign over all Ireland . . . and of his seed fifty seven kings ruled Ireland before Patrick preached the passion and catholic faith and rule of Christ to the Irish, and after Patrick fifty kings of his issue ruled Ireland" (*Corp. Gen.*, 123, cf. beginning of Laud Genealogies). In accordance with this principle of periodization, the Irish king list just cited divides the monarchs into two groups with the rubrics *haec sunt nomina incredentium/qui non crediderunt regum* "these are the names of the unbelieving/of the kings who did not believe" and *haec sunt credentium regum nomina* "these are the names of the believing kings" respectively, the latter beginning with Lóegaire son of Níall. Thus Irish history was divided into two great epochs before and after (conversion to) the faith, *ría cretim* and *íar cretim* or the like respectively (e.g. *LU* 4035; *CIH* 527.14-7), Patrick's mission marking the turning point.

This was conventionally dated to 432 A.D.: "in the year of the Lord 432 Patrick came to Ireland in the ninth year of the reign of Theodosius the Less, in the first year of the episcopate of Sixtus the forty-second bishop of the Roman Church. So Bede and Marcellinus and Isidore compute in their chronicles" (*AU* 432). The main conversion of the Irish to the Christian faith was then supposed to have taken place in the following year: *conversio Scotorum in fidem christianam* (*AI* 433). The fact that both the date of the mission and the standard account of the conversion are highly tendentious and correspondingly unlikely to be correct (McCone, 1984b, 33-4 and 47-9) is beside the point here. What matters is that these were the dates devised and accepted by medieval Irish *literati* as the linchpin of a periodization of Irish history appended to a Christian scheme of the world's six main epochs (*sex aetates*

mundi in Isidore *Etym.* V xxxix marked by Creation, Flood, Abraham, David's reign, Captivity, Christ's birth) according to which the pre-Patrician sections of the annals were divided.

Various figures and events supposed to belong to the pre-Christian period in Ireland could now be given precise dates and interwoven with those ascribed to major people and happenings on the classical and biblical world stage set by the chronicles of Eusebius and others (cf. van Hamel, 1928). This process is duly apparent in varying proportions in extant Irish annalistic compilations such as *AU, AT* and *AI*, and this concern with a proper chronological framework for the narrative and genealogical components of *senchus* as a whole is at least as old as the seventh century. For instance, Tírechán is at pains to date Lóegaire's reign and that of Cairbre Nia Fer as precisely as possible in relation to Patrick's activities and death, itself dated 433 years after Christ's passion (1(7), 2, 40(7) in Bieler, 1979). Discrepancies were almost bound to arise as separate schemes of this sort were developed and gradually harmonised with each other. However, the basic point is that any given person, event or narrative of note could be, and usually was, given an appropriate date, as when the author of *Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó* carefully gives 300 B.C. as the date of the hostilities between Ulster and the rest of Ireland upon which his story is based (par. 5: *trí chét bliadan ría ngein Chríst ro:boí in cocad etorro*). As far as relative and absolute chronology was concerned, the early Irish 'tradition' known to us from the written record was thoroughly historical in conception and presentation.

It has already been pointed out (ch. 2, 3) that Patrick's biographer Muirchú deliberately infused his account of the conflict between king Lóegaire of Tara and the saint with echoes of king Herod of Jerusalem's perfidy towards the baby Jesus, and it will be argued in the next chapter that these resonances with the Gospel story were markedly enhanced in the early eighth century. In this way Patrick's mission to Ireland could be presented as a partial reenactment of Christ's mission to Israel and the world, the corollary being that Patrick's arrival in Ireland with the new faith divided two distinct epochs of her history just as Christ's arrival on the scene divided the Old Testament from the New in biblical and global terms.

In effect, then, Ireland's *literati* periodised their island's *senchus* as a microcosm of current Christian world history, but the extent to which they modelled their assumed ancestors' status and actions on those of God's chosen people in the Old Testament is quite striking in its audacity. It has been seen that the Goedelic exodus from Egypt and subsequent wanderings were deliberately correlated with those of the Israelites, while the struggles of the Túatha Dé Danann with the Fir Bolg and Fomorians in *Cath Maige Tuired* broadly resembled those of the Israelites with the inhabitants of Canaan and the neighbouring Philistines. The following chapter should show that these parallels and contacts were pushed even further in the field of law.

10. In the Bible God's dealings with men after the Flood fall into three main stages. First comes the period of the patriarchs, in which God singles out individuals for a privileged relationship, notably the trio of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with their families or alternatively the trio of Enoch, Noah and Abraham emphasised in the eighth-century Irish *Bibelwerk* as recipients of divinely inspired natural law (McNamara, 1987, 94; see ch. 4, 4). After the exodus from Egypt this is followed by

the covenant with the whole people of Israel, who are thereby bound to observe the Law enunciated through Moses in return for special divine blessings and protection. Finally, there is Christ's new covenant fulfilling the old one and extending it to the gentiles.

Early medieval Ireland's monastic men of learning could hardly make the unbiblical claim that their gentile race had enjoyed a covenant with God before the coming of Christianity, although we shall see below and in chapter four that they eventually developed ambitious doctrines that came perilously close to this position. Consequently Patrick's establishment of the faith among them amounted to a telescoping of the old and new covenants together, and the biblical model would suggest that their pre-Patrician Irish history be seen as an era of Irish 'patriarchs' or individuals blessed with faith and a partial revelation of divine truth even before the apostle Patrick brought the full dispensation on Christ's behalf. In effect, this is an Irish microcosm of the bipartite scheme of the world's redemption presented in the celebrated opening of the Epistle to the Hebrews: *multifariam et multis modis olim Deus loquens patribus in prophetis novissime diebus istis locutus est nobis in Filio* "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son".

What looks like the earliest version of this notion is neatly summarised at the beginning of the *LU* tract *Senchas na Relec*: "a great king of great judgement who was over Ireland, namely Cormac son of Art son of Conn of the Hundred Battles. It was well, then, that Ireland was in his time because judgement of law (*breth recht(g)a(e)*) was dispensed through Ireland by him, so that the killing of a man in Ireland was not dared in the period of little jubilee, i.e. of seven years (cf. Lev. 25:2-7). For Cormac had faith in the one God according to law. For he had said that he would not worship stones or trees but would worship the one who had made them and was lord behind every creature (*ropo chomsid ar cúl na uli dúla*), namely the one mighty Lord God who had fashioned creation, it is in him he would believe. Consequently he is the third person in Ireland who believed before the coming of Patrick, i.e. Conchobar son of Ness to whom Altus recounted Christ's passion, Morand son of Cairbe Cat-head the second man, Cormac the third, and thus it is likely that other people followed in their footsteps regarding that faith" (*LU* ll. 4041-52, cf. 4057-68 and *Genemuin Chormaic* ll. 114-24). Cormac's prescience is based upon Saint Paul's doctrine (Rom. 1:17-25) that from the beginning it was open to anyone to perceive God through his creation but that this opportunity was missed by most of mankind, "who changed the truth of God into a lie and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator (*et coluerunt et servierunt creaturae potius quem creatori*)" (ibid., 25), sentiments clearly echoed by Cormac's argument (note *dúil* glossing Lat. *creatura* at Ml. 25ª1 etc.).

Given that some four hundred years were supposed to have elapsed between the emergence of Christianity in Mediterranean parts and Ireland's conversion by Patrick, a further possibility presented itself: pre-Patrician Irishmen could become acquainted with the new faith either by going abroad or by contact with a foreign visitor to Ireland. Both of these approaches are combined in the Latin lives of the supposedly pre-Patrician saint Ailbe of Emly (cf. McCone, 1984b, 49-52). More to the point here, one of the trio named in *Senchas na Relec* makes a trip abroad to gain wisdom from the apostle to the gentiles: "then there was another collar of Morann, i.e. Morann of great judgement went to Paul the apostle and brought an

epistle from him and it used to be around his neck. When, then, Morann came to his fort on returning from Paul he met one of his bondmaids at the entrance of the fort. When, then, she saw the epistle round his neck she questioned him. 'What collar is that, (*cid sín sein*), Morann?' said she. 'Indeed,' said Caimín the fool 'it shall be Morann's collar (*sín Morainn*) from today till Doomsday'. When, therefore, Morann used to give judgement, he used to put the epistle round his neck and he would not utter falsehood then" (*Scél na Fír Flatha*, par. 16).

The stories of Cormac and Morann are primarily concerned with how righteous judgements in accordance with Scripture could be precociously delivered in Ireland before Saint Patrick's coming (Ó Corráin, 1987, 285-8), an issue that will be more fully discussed in the next chapter. However, this aspect plays no role in what is probably the oldest and best known tale in this group, namely *Aided Chonchobair*. The earliest and fullest version A of this death-tale falls into two halves. The first of these revolves round the practice of head-hunting (ch. 2, 1) and tells how the calcified brain of the Leinsterman Mes Gegra, slain by the Ulster hero Conall Cernach, becomes a fatal weapon in the hands of the Connachtman Cet mac Mágach, who casts it at the Ulster king Conchobar and brings him down with two thirds of it lodging in his skull (pars. 1-6). Since this section concludes with the words "his grave is there in the place where he fell and a pillar-stone against his head and a pillar-stone against his feet", Carney may well be right in seeing this as the "traditional nucleus" of the tale about Conchobar's end (1955, 296). However, as Carney stresses, "in the story as we have it he is revived in a most unconvincing fashion in order to play a part in what is essentially a Christian story" and "while we may see in the early portion of the tale a genuine traditional story it cannot be shown that there was an early written form of the tale lacking the Christian element" (ibid., 296-7).

In the second part of the story Conchobar is brought home and told by his physician that he will die if the ball is removed but can be healed if the blemish is left in place. The Ulstermen vote for the latter option and Conchobar is patched up but warned against the fatal consequences of getting excited. He remained in this inactive state for seven years until the great earthquake at the time of Christ's crucifixion (Matth. 27:51), the cause of which was explained to him by his druid. This news stirred Conchobar to an outburst of difficult *retoiric* deploring these events and he duly died. The end of the *LL* version refers to an alternative account, more fully recounted in version C, whereby the visiting Roman consul Altus brought Conchobar tidings of the crucifixion with the result that "he then arose and made the onslaught so that the brain of Mes Gegra jumped out of his head. Hence it is that the Irish say that Conchobar is the first pagan who went to heaven in Ireland, because the blood that sprang from his head was a baptism for him" (C, par. 5). In an important forthcoming study Johan Corthals has produced the first complete translation and interpretation of the rhetoric in version A and agrees with Carney that it forms an integral part of the surviving story. Corthals cautiously suggests that this alliterative poem is unlikely on linguistic grounds to have been composed after the early eighth century and shows that it is a theologically sophisticated product firmly based upon the Gospel accounts of Christ's passion well as upon a patristic doctrine of baptism by blood.

Already in the second half of the seventh century we find Tírechán displaying an interest in the posthumous baptism of a royal swineherd who had died well before

the Patrician mission (40 (7-8) in Bieler, 1979), but *Aided Chonchobair* is more than a tale about its hero's precocious baptism by blood. By hallowing the Ulster heroes' leader in the service of Christ it provides a charter for the monastic cultivation of the genre as a whole and shows how appropriate facets of the pre-Christian ethos can find typological fulfilment in the new faith.

11. According to the Middle Irish *Scél na Fír Flatha* Cormac mac Airt was interested in more than quasi-Mosaic law (cf. ch. 4, 7): "moreover, a most wondrous deed was performed by Cormac then, namely the compiling of Cormac's Psalter (*Saltair Chormaic*), i.e. there were gathered the old men and historians (*sin 7 senchaidi*) of Ireland around Fintan mac Bóchra and Fíthal the poet (*fili*) so that the histories and the genealogies and the reigns of her kings and rulers and their battles and their contests and their antiquities down from the beginning of the world until then were written, so that that is the Psalter of Tara (*Saltair Temrach*), which is the root and foundation and source for the historians of Ireland from then until the present day" (par. 57). The antediluvian near-immortal Fintan functions elsewhere as repository of Ireland's traditions since the creation. For instance, according to the account of various marvels on the night of Conn Cétchathach's birth in *Airne Fíngein* "the truth of Ireland and her chronology (*coimgne*) and her prophecy and her history (*senchus*) and her due rights have been hidden until tonight. For he (Fintan) is the only (righteous) man that the flood has left behind. It is tonight that the spirit of the prophet Samuel (*spirut Samuéil fátha*) has been sent from the Lord in the form of a tender youth to strike a blow into his mouth from a sunbeam so that it may be through the middle of his back, so that there are seven chains or seven eloquences on his tongue thereafter. So that it is tonight that *senchus* and *coimgne* have been made known" (ll. 77-86).

Fintan plays a central role in the roughly tenth- or eleventh-century narrative *Do Suidigud Tellaich Temra* 'On the settling of the manor of Tara', which has been subjected by Rees and Rees (1961, 114f.) to a rather fanciful Dumézilian interpretation inspired by alleged Indian parallels. However, even a cursory reading of this thoroughgoing synthetic historical text, which pullulates with explicit Christian and biblical references, reveals it as a particularly elaborate and ambitious attempt to integrate Irish *senchus* with Christian world history through the agency of Fintan.

The Irish establishment gathered for the feast of Tara demands a delimitation of Tara's demesne from the Uí Néill king King Díarmait mac Cerbaill, who seeks the counsel of the clerics Flann Febla and Fíachra mac Colmáin (see Ó Riain, 1985, 11, pars. 64-5). These recommend the monastic scholar Cenn Fáelad (ch.1, 10), who in turn suggests recourse to the five seniors of each province, including Tuán mac Cairill from Ulster (cf. 8 above). Finally, these recommend Noah's grandson Fintan, who proceeds to reveal Ireland's *senchus* to the assembled host. First a more or less standard account of the various invasions from the antedeluvian Cessair and postdeluvian Partholón down to the sons of Míl is given in verse (par. 9). This is followed by a poetic account of major judgements in Ireland framed by biblical phases initiated by Moses, David and Christ (par. 12; see ch.4, 4). Then comes Fintan's central narrative about an ancient Irish assembly at which the gigantic Trefuilngid Tre-eochair 'Three-sufferer Three-key' with his trinitarian name appears with stone tablets and a branch (from the tree of life in paradise according to *Airne Fíngein* ll. 52-9) to tell of Christ's crucifixion (par. 14-5). In response to his

questions the king of Ireland tells of the Gaels' exodus from Egypt, which is explicitly linked with the Hebrews' departure, and of their subsequent wanderings to Ireland via Spain (par. 16-8).

Trefuilngid remains with the assembled men of Ireland for the biblical span of forty days and forty nights. "'Show us', he said 'what are the foundations of chronology (*ailgi coimgni*) of the men of Ireland in the king's house of Tara with you'. 'Indeed, there have not', they said 'been wise historians (*senchaidi*) among us to whom we ventured the foundations of chronology until you came'. 'You shall have that from me', he said 'and I shall establish for you an arrangement of history (*sreith senchusa*) and foundations of the chronology of the hearth of Tara itself with the four quarters of Ireland around it'" (par. 20). This knowledge Trefuilngid reveals to seven sages from each quarter, entrusting its exposition before the men of Ireland to the oldest of these, Fintan, who then reveals the arrangement of four provinces around a centre and tells how an ancient tree in each of these fifths was seeded by a berry from Trefuilngid's branch. Fintan urges that Trefuilngid's dispensation be continued, "for he was an angel of God or he was God himself (*ar ba haingel Dé héside nó fa Día féisin*" (par. 31).

Finally, Fintan sets up a five-ridged stone at the meeting of the fifths in Uisnech (supposed site of a regular *mór-dál* or 'great assembly' according to *Scél na Fír Flatha*, par. 55), "and he assigned a ridge of it to every fifth in Ireland, for thus Tara and Uisnech are in Ireland as its two kidneys are wont to be in a beast" (par. 32). In view of the connection between Fintan and Samuel in *Airne Fíngein* mentioned above this activity may well be a deliberate echo of 1 Sam./Kgs. 7:12: "then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer (Vulg. *Lapis Adiutorii* 'stone of assistance'), saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us". Mizpeh, of course, was where the assembled Israelites acclaimed Saul as king (ibid. 10:17f.) after he had been anointed by the prophet (10:1). Arguably still more suggestive is the great covenantal stone set up by Joshua at Shechem just before his death: "and he said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto you; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto you lest perchance ye wish hereafter to deny and lie unto your Lord God" (Josh. 24:27).

Fintan then feels his end drawing nigh and utters autobiographical verses. "So Fintan ended his life and his age in this wise and attained repentence and took communion and the sacrament from the hand of bishop Erc son of Ochomon son of Fidach, and the spirit of Patrick and Brigit came so that they were present at his passing. It is uncertain, however, where he has been buried, but people think it is in his physical body that he was taken to some secret divine place, as Elijah and Enoch were taken to paradise, so that they are awaiting the resurrection of that aged patriarch (*sruthseanóir*), i.e. Fintan son of Bóchra son of Eithier son of Rúal son of Annid son of Ham son of Noah son of Lamech. *Finit. Amen.*" (par. 36).

Thus this carefully constructed frame narrative comes full circle. It begins with a Christian Irish establishment confronted by a problem and seeking a solution in the past through the agency of clerics, who secure access to the island's oldest surviving patriarch, the very embodiment of pre-Patrician *senchus*. At the text's centre the promulgation of that *senchus* by 'God's angel or God himself' Trefuilngid is revealed. In turn, the antediluvian Fintan's contact with Ireland's Christian generation brings him to final redemption. Thus the realms of Ireland's pre- and post-

Patrician *senchus*, Irish and biblical world history, the Old and the New Testament meet, interact and finally merge. The basic message is, surely, that Irish *senchus* is rooted in God's word, vouchsafed to the pre-Patrician Irish as to the pre-covenant patriarchs of Israel, and is, moreover, firmly under the Church's control.

We now have an obvious answer to the riddle of how early Christian Ireland's monastically oriented *literati*, working within a historical framework modelled upon the Bible, could conscientiously regard their pre-Christian past as an object worthy of earnest attention. In effect, narratives purporting to cover people and events prior to Patrick's mission and establishment of the true faith could be treated as a kind of 'Old Testament' of the Irish race, a socially, morally and aetiologically instructive God-given record perfected but by no means invalidated by the new dispensation of Christianity. Since the Old Testament itself abounds with apparently unedifying details held to have a sacred purpose (cf. ch. 2, 1), there was no need to be unduly squeamish about the contents of analogous Irish narratives. After all, the Bible itself bears abundant testimony to the possibility of conveying a moral negatively by depicting the evil consequences of bad behaviour as well as by more straightforward positive means.

12. Virtually all of its critics past and present are agreed about the narrative brilliance of *Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó* and what Nora Chadwick terms its "laconic humour and a spirit of ripe burlesque" (1968, 81), but thereafter interpretations diverge markedly. For Thurneysen "it gives a vivid picture of the warlike spirit of the time" (1935, i), whereas for Chadwick it is rather "a well-preserved heroic tradition, seen through the prismatic lense of a later age" (ibid., 91). More recently Cornelius Buttimer has argued for its coherent structure and concern with socio-political themes such as the "successful defence of honor, and a consequent enhancement of the prestige of Leinster" (1982, 68) as well as with the moral dimension implied by its status as "a classic lesson in the likelihood that excess will lead to futility" (ibid., 65). On the other hand, Jeffrey Gantz (1981, 179-80) and Donnchadh Ó Corráin regard it as, in the latter's words, "a sophisticated parody of the heroic genre as represented by *Táin Bó Cúailgne*" (1985, 86).

For all its decidedly grim humour and moments of bathos, this taut and purposeful narrative is far from frivolous and can hardly be dismissed as a mere burlesque with no aim beyond parody for entertainment's sake. Rather the humour and bathos help to convey a message that is no less serious for being subversive of the untrammeled heroic ethos. I would suggest that what we have here is a deadly earnest, if at times amusing, moral satire in the classical tradition of the ever popular Horace or Juvenal but inevitably geared by its monastic author to Christian principles.

The action begins with the greedy and inconsiderate requests of those powerful rivals Connacht and Ulster for Mac Da Thó's great hound. At a loss for a solution, Mac Da Thó lapses into *socht* or sloth until his wife advises him to offer the dog to each side without the other's knowledge. One does not, of course, need to go beyond chapter three of Genesis to appreciate the disastrous consequences of following female counsel, and the folly of trusting women is duly emphasised in early Irish literature, a classic instance being the great misogynist litany in section 16 of *Tecosca Cormaic*. The subsequent extensive losses of honour, life and property in our tale all stem ultimately from Mac Da Thó's craven abdication of proper male responsibility to follow his wife's Machiavellian advice.

Mac Da Thó duly makes the deceitful promise to both sides and bids them come proudly on a stated day to partake of his bounty. However, as usual in this story, expectations are cruelly frustrated and the enemy companies take their seats in an atmosphere of sullen hatred. Even the majestic pig on which they are to feast is not really the oversized *cochon au lait* that it seems: "three score milch-cows feeding it for seven years. However, it was on poison that it was being fed so that the slaughter of the men of Ireland might be carried out through it" (par. 5). There follows Bricriu's malicious proposal that the privilege of carving be awarded by contests that take the form of boasting. After various major Ulster heroes have been disgraced by Cet mac Mágach in this, Cet himself is in turn devastatingly worsted by Conall Cernach. Conall's division of the pig begins with an act of gross gluttony and culminates in deliberate niggardliness towards the men of Connacht, whose envious and angry response swiftly leads to a savage conflict with heavy losses on both sides. Ailill and Medb's charioteer, Fer Loga, succeeds in slaying Mac Da Thó's hound and then surprises the king of the victorious Ulstermen, Conchobar, into a degrading agreement to have the women of his province admire this opportunist upstart as a warrior of note.

The striking bathos of this concluding episode has never been satisfactorily explained. Its deliberate structural similarity to the tale of Cú Chulainn's slaughter of the Culann the smith's savage hound has already been pointed out, as has the contrast between Cú Chulainn's resultant permanent attainment of ideal warrior status and the temporary or bogus benefits reaped by the mere charioteer Fer Loga from a similar action (see 5 above). It is as if a chauffeur were to spend a modest pools win on a brief taste of the high life before returning to his previous employment. However, its very bathos can be seen as precisely the point of this conclusion, which subverts the love of fighting as an end in itself by representing battle as a bagatelle in which, with luck, even the lowly born might distinguish themselves at their betters' expense, a scenario hardly calculated to appeal to an aristocratic audience.

All in all, the author of this splendidly entertaining saga presents us with a memorable gallery of morally reprehensible characters and actions. As the plot unfolds, major heroes, up to and including the king of Ulster himself, are humiliated one by one, and there is widespread death and destruction extending to the ultimate cause of the conflict, Mac Da Thó's hound, which is thus lost to owner and would-be owner alike. The thoroughly unchristian behaviour depicted in *Scéla Muicce Meic Da Tó* thus proves totally futile and counter-productive for all concerned. In effect, this story is a glorious moral essay on the consequences, dire, absurd or both as the case might be, of human vanity (cf. Buttimer, 1982, 65). As the Book of Proverbs puts it, "pride goeth before destruction and an haughty spirit before a fall" (16:18). *Scéla Muicce* illustrates a veritable catalogue of serious sins, all of them duly catastrophic, and among other things indirectly issues a salutary reminder that "these six things doth the Lord hate: yea seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among his brethren" (Prov. 6:16-9).

The Fer Loga episode hardly manifests the deliberate allusions to the story of Cú Chulainn and the hound that we might expect in a primarily literary parody. Rather

its monastic author has displayed the ability, noted earlier with regard to Muirchú and biblical narrative, to apprehend the structural core or essence of his model and recreate it with rather different surface details and such permutations as suited his purpose. This is a classic stratagem for generating myths, and the essentially mythological cast of thought underlying much early Irish narrative is in any case clear from its accessibility to structuralist approaches developed with reference to other mythical traditions. The historicising chronological framework in which the early Irish literary corpus is anchored no more detracts from this fundamental quality than it does in the case of the Bible, which is likewise proving to contain plenty of material amenable to structuralist interpretations as myth (cf. Leach and Aycock, 1983). Indeed, basic similarities between native and biblical mythopoeic concepts and techniques seem to have endowed medieval Irish *literati* with a remarkable instinctive grasp of the purport of biblical narrative, genealogy etc. that the modern rationalist can only hope to match with mechanical structuralist aids. The upshot was a profound creative interplay between their native and ecclesiastical inheritance to produce the thoroughly integrated hybrid medium in which all extant early Irish literature, history and mythology seems to be rooted. Although endowed with its own rationale and momentum, this matrix continued to be able to adapt and absorb elements from the Bible or elsewhere as occasion demanded.

13. On the other hand, Irish monastic scholars were also heirs to a late classical and early medieval ecclesiastical tradition that was uncomfortable with certain aspects of the Old Testament in particular and correspondingly prone to seek more rational or edifying interpretations by means of allegory and historical typology, the central role of which in medieval thought has been emphasised above (see 2). Certain allegoristic modes of interpretation, for instance taking a woman to represent the Church (see below), were so standard that any monastic writer might reasonably expect readers to make the commoner symbolic equations of this type, at least when appropriately cued. Given that mythical modes of thought and composition were apparently still being vigorously practised by early Christian Ireland's monastic men of letters, the intriguing possibility presents itself that allegorical values could be 'remythologised', so to speak, as constituents of new narratives.

No early Irish narrative genres have been more discussed than those of the *echtrae* or 'outing' and the *immram* or 'voyage'. While acknowledging some interaction, nativists tend to view the former as fundamentally pagan or traditional and the latter as essentially ecclesiastical (e.g. Mac Cana, 1980, 77). This attempt to apply a classificatory straitjacket has inevitably led to a sterile debate as to whether the early *Immram Brain*, being allegedly less Christian (at least when rid of certain inconvenient 'interpolations') than other extant voyage tales, should not rather be considered an *echtrae* (so David Dumville, 1976). However, Séamus Mac Mathúna has recently supplied the *reductio ad absurdum* by referring to "the vexed question of the *genre* to which *Bran* actually belongs. Is it an *echtrae* or is it an *immram*? Is it an *echtrae* with *immram* elements or is it an *immram* with *echtrae* elements?" (1985, 275). The irrelevance of the alleged dichotomy between native and ecclesiastical genres to this futile taxonomic exercise is well illustrated by what is generally regarded as the oldest extant *echtrae, Echtrae Chonlai*.

In this short tale a woman comes to summon Conn Cétchathach's son Conlae from the world of death to the land of the living, where there is no death, sin or

transgression but an abundance of feasting and peace under a fine king. Although she appears only to Conlae, the whole gathering can hear her, but Conn gets his druid to cast a spell rendering her invisible and inaudible. However, as she disappears she throws an apple to Conlae, who refuses all food or drink save the apple, which nevertheless stays whole. Conlae is filled with desire for the woman but, on her return, Conn again summons the druid. This time the woman foretells the coming of a righteous man with many followers who will destroy druidry before the Devil. Although in two minds about leaving his own life and people, Conlae finally jumps into the boat with her and disappears.

Carney has argued persuasively that *Immram Brain* and *Echtrae Chonlai* are thoroughly Christian allegories (1955, 280-95 and 1969, 162-5 respectively), but Mac Cana maintains "that, notwithstanding the palpable Christian motivation of the authors of *Immram Brain* and *Echtrae Chonlai*, their image of the Otherworld is essentially a traditional one in which the Christian notion of heavenly chastity has as yet no function" (1976, 114) and adheres to the wild claim that nine priestesses located by first-century A.D. geographer Pomponius Mela on an island off the Armorican coast "are an early literary reflex of the inhabitants of the otherworld Land of Women, and in particular of the thrice nine women who welcome the voyagers in *Immram Brain*" (ibid., 112). Moreover, the attitude of the two tales' monastic redactors to paganism was supposedly governed by "a benign ecumenism that is unclouded by propaganda or polemic" (ibid., 95), tending merely "to make a distinction between benign paganism and malignant paganism and to regard druidism as the embodiment of the latter" (ibid., 96). In identifying the woman's function, Mac Cana applies the usual nativist tag of pagan sovereignty goddess (ibid., 110-4), and states of *Echtrae Chonlai* that "the whole *raison d'être* of the tale is the clash of passion and pietas in the person of Conlae and the clash of ideologies and moralities represented by the druid on the one hand and the fairy woman on the other" (ibid., 98).

As Scowcroft has pertinently remarked of late, "students of early Irish tradition have too often pursued a kind of literary archaeology, excavating (sometimes creating) documentary ruins out of which to reconstruct pagan antiquity. Ignoring or dismissing the churches built of that same ancient stone, they may fail to see that their reconstructions rest on cruciform foundations" (1988, 1). In the present instance, not only is 'benign ecumenism' towards any variety of paganism a highly improbable governing motive for a monastic redactor, as already pointed out (ch. 1, 4), but the allegedly pagan goddess in *Echtrae Chonlai* represents the land of the living as a sinless paradise in an obviously Christian sense and makes an unmistakable prophecy about the coming of Patrick and Christianity. Indeed, Carney (1969, 162-5) has made the brilliant suggestion that the everlasting apple given by the woman to Conlae is the converse of the fruit given by Eve to Adam, namely an apple from the tree of life mentioned in Genesis 3:22-4, an interpretation supported by the vignette of Conlae and his woman in the rather later *Echtra Thaidg mheic Chéin* (O'Grady, 1892, 350). We may further compare Trefuilngid's branch with three fruits, which is explicitly stated by *Airne Fíngein* to come from the tree in paradise (see 11 above). Presumably the three fruits symbolise the Holy Trinity, and a similar origin and significance may be surmised for the branch with three apples given to Cormac by his visitor from a land without death, decay or sin in *Scél na Fír Flatha* (pars. 25-7). As Carney rightly points out, the central conflict in

Echtrae Chonlai is between paganism and Christianity, embodied by the druid and woman respectively, and Conlae's dilemma about giving up his world, family and friends for the promise of everlasting life is highly germane to monastic ideals.

In his famous *Expositio in canticum canticorum* (Verbraken, 1963) Gregory the Great indulges in remarkable flights of fancy to squeeze spiritual edification from the exuberantly erotic Song of Songs, and begins the following exposition of his basic approach with remarks highly germane to the notion of *immram* or *echtrae*: "after the human race was expelled from the joys of paradise, coming into that wandering of the present life it has a heart blind to spiritual understanding. If this blind heart were to be told by the divine voice 'follow God' or 'love God', as it is told in the Law, once sent abroad and cold through the torpor of unbelief it would not grasp what it heard. Therefore, the divine discourse talks to the torpid and cold soul through certain figures about things that it knows and thus secretly recommends to it a love that it does not know (par. 1) For divine sentiments are clothed in known things, by which allegories are made, and, when we recognise the outer words, we arrive at the inner meaning (par. 2). For hence it is that in this book, which is written in the Song of Songs, are set words as if of carnal love, so that the soul, freshened by familiar discourse, may wax hot and through words about lower love may be stirred to higher love. For in this book kisses are mentioned, breasts are mentioned, cheeks are mentioned, thighs are mentioned, and in these words the holy description is not to be mocked but the greater mercy of God is to be contemplated (par. 3) . . . And one should know that in this book four speaking persons are introduced, namely the groom, the bride, young women with the bride and groups of companions with the groom. For the bride is the perfect Church, the groom is the Lord, the young women with the bride are initiate souls reaching maturity through new study. Moreover, the companions of the groom are either angels, who have often come from Him to appear to men, or indeed certain perfect men in the Church, who know how to announce the truth to men. But those who are individually young women or companions, are all together the bride because they are all together the Church" (par. 10).

Thus Gregory derives a spiritual message from ostensibly unedifying externals and introduces us to a central tenet of medieval allegory and typology, namely that important women in the Bible can usually be taken to symbolize or prefigure the Church. Moreover, it appears that "the Canticle of Canticles was held in particular esteem in early Ireland among the Céli Dé. In the *Teaching of Mael Ruain* we read that 'when a person was at the point of death, or immediately after the soul had left him, the *Canticum Salomonis* was sung over him. The reason for this practice was that in that canticle is signified the union of the Church and every Christian soul - *ceangal na heaglaise agus gacha hanma Críostuidhe*'" (McNamara, 1987, 105). A nice example of this allegorical approach to women is provided by Isidore in the case of the book of Esther, "in which it is written that the same queen in the image of the Church of God snatched the people from servitude and death, and by the death of Aman, who is interpreted as iniquity, the fame of that day is transmitted to posterity (*in quo eadem regina sub figura ecclesiae Dei populum a servitute et morte eripuisse scribitur, atque interfecto Aman, qui interpretatur iniquitas, diei celebritas in posteros mittitur*)" (*Etym.* VI ii 29).

Given the Christian flavour of her message and prophecy, it can hardly be doubted that the otherworld woman in *Echtrae Chonlai* symbolizes the Church in

accordance with an allegoristic principle undoubtedly familiar to early Irish monastic men of letters. The tale revolving round Conlae is thus an allegory of the global and individual conflict between pagan iniquity and Christian virtue (druid vs. woman), the claims of this world and those of the life everlasting (Conn vs. woman). Given the ease with which Gregory and others could allegorize the most blatant erotic details concerning the women in the Song of Songs, the whiff of sex surrounding the paradise of *Immram Brain, Echtrae Chonlai* and similar texts would obviously present no problems to a medieval Irish monk familiar with the idea of using discourse about carnal love to promote its spiritual counterpart. Consequently this feature is not good evidence for a fundamentally pagan view of the otherworld rather than an allegoristically Christian one.

Furthermore, the mainspring of this narrative can be regarded as biblical through and through by virtue of constituting a deliberate inversion of the narrative of the fall in Genesis. There, of course, the serpent is the agent of sin who induces the woman to eat the forbidden fruit and tempt Adam to do likewise, the result being mortality and damnation for the human race. In *Echtrae Chonlai* by contrast the woman successfully tempts Conlae to redemption and everlasting life with the apple of immortality despite the serpentine druid's efforts to thwart her. In essence, then, *Echtrae Chonlai* is an early Irish 'paradise regained', a thoroughly Christian composition inspired by the Bible. Far from calling for the hypothesis of a significant pagan native core, this tale is a prime example of an allegorical myth or, if one prefers, a mythical allegory firmly rooted in Christian ideology. Moreover, as a narrative pertaining to the pre-Patrician 'Old Testament' it has an obvious prophetic and typological significance in relation to the coming of Christianity, as do the two great parallel poems in *Immram Brain*. In this respect it is worth noting that the idea of pre-Christian revelation beyond the confines of Israel was by no means confined to the Irish. Thus Isidore remarks of the Sybils of ancient Greece and Rome that 'of all these are brought forth poems in which they are most clearly shown to have written many things for the gentiles too concerning God and Christ (*quarum omnium carmina efferuntur in quibus de Deo et de Christo et gentibus multa scripsisse manifestissime conprobantur*)' (*Etym.* VIII viii 7).

It thus transpires that mythological, historicising, allegoristic and typological factors could be combined freely and often inextricably together in varying proportions by early Christian Irish *literati* to modify preexisting narratives and generate new ones. This overall control of an authoritative but adaptable *senchus* enabled the Church and her allies to monitor and modulate the values and institutions of the governing class as a whole, while giving scope for various political groupings, both lay and ecclesiastical, to articulate and press their own particular claims (see ch. 10). Native mythological modes of thought and expression might resonate happily with those of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, and prove no less amenable to the pervasive influence of historical typology and allegory so crucial to the medieval Christian world-view. All in all, the upshot of these syncretistic trends in Ireland seems to have been a coherent ideological framework thoroughly in tune with the various spiritual and secular interests of a monastically oriented learned class whose socio-political concerns and connections extended well beyond the confines of the cloister.

That being so, the search for constituent values pertinent to the decoding of extant early Irish mytho-historical narratives will need to cover current ecclesiastical

learning and thought, including allegory and historical typology, as well as the so-called 'native' milieu of the secular norms and ideals discernible in roughly contemporaneous lay society. This dichotomy, of course, was very far from absolute. Indeed, it can only be assumed that early medieval Irish mythology and tradition, like those of other peoples (cf. 3 above and ch. 1, 3), were essentially shaped or reshaped by the social system of the time, and it has already emerged that that was basically characterised by *comúaim n-ecalsa fri túaith* or the "sewing together of Church with State" (ch. 1, 11).

CHAPTER FOUR

The law and the prophets

1. The very extent of the surviving corpus of early Irish canon and civil legal tracts in Latin and the vernacular bears ample testimony to the preoccupation of medieval Ireland's men of letters with the law, and a number of considerations suggest that at least some aspects of this legal theory and practice have roots in the pagan Celtic or even Indo-European past.

Various classical authors, mostly drawing upon the lost Celtic ethnography of the first-century B.C. Greek philosopher-cum-historian Posidonius of Apamea (Tierney, 1960), provide snippets of information about pagan Gaulish legal practice. Thus the first-century Greek geographer Strabo remarks of the druids that "it is chiefly entrusted to these to try cases of homicide . . . and when there is an abundance of these they consider that there is also abundance of the land" (IV iv 4). Furthermore, Julius Caesar claims that "they decide about almost all public and private disputes and, if any crime has been committed, a murder perpetrated, or a dispute about inheritance or boundaries exists, these judge and determine the penalties" and speaks of a national judicial assembly of Gaul's druids held annually in the central territory of the Carnutes (*de Bello Gallico* VI 13, 5-10).

From this it would appear that the pagan Celts had well developed legal institutions and already held the belief so prominent in medieval Irish sources that good judgements promote natural abundance while bad judgements lead to corresponding scarcity (see McLeod, 1982, and ch. 5,1). Accordingly it is no surprise that the early Irish law tracts have been treated as a fruitful source of comparisons with the medieval Welsh and other more ancient Indo-European legal material aimed at recovering key pagan Celtic and Indo-European legal terms, concepts and processes. Valid and valuable though such comparative studies geared to prehistory are, if conducted with the necessary rigour, they should not be used to evade the crucial issue of how the early medieval Irish jurists themselves viewed the foundations and workings of their legal system as represented in texts compiled well after the triumph of Christianity in the fifth and sixth centuries. Dismissive claims that "though the Irish laws - like the Roman - have a Christian facade, their basic structure is pagan" (Binchy, 1954, 53) notwithstanding, attention to more or less contemporary conditioning factors seems worthwhile not only as an end in itself but also as a necessary prerequisite for effective research into pre-Christian antecedents.

Early Irish law recognized polygamy and several different types of wedlock with arguable Indian or other parallels suggesting pagan Celtic and Indo-European roots (e.g. Binchy, 1936, vi; Dillon, 1973, 13), and this has been seen as a symptom of juristic conservatism and independence of the Church. However, a recent study by Ó Corráin (1985b) points out that many such practices could not only be found in the Old Testament but were also less out of step than is commonly thought with the standards of an early medieval western Church still relatively indulgent towards marital practices that fell short of the Christian ideal. Whatever their ultimate origins, some of these customs betray signs of ecclesiastical influence. Moreover, although monogamy was only insisted upon for clerics and poets (e.g. *CIH* 588.26-38; Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 1984, 400-3), the Church's further aspirations could be expressed by juristic use of the unflattering Latin borrowing *adaltrach* 'adulteress' for an additional wife (cf. Power in Binchy, 1936, 84-8).

Needless to say, early Christian Irish lawyers preferred Old Testament parallels to the notion of pagan survival as a means of justifying the more questionable types of liaison. Thus the author of *Bretha Crólige* notes that "there is a dispute in Irish law as to which is more proper, whether it is a plurality of congress or one. For the chosen ones of God were in plurality of unions, so that it is not easier to condemn it than to praise it" (Binchy, 1938, 44-5). Furthermore, the right of a daughter in Irish law to inherit from her father in the absence of male descendants and keep this inheritance in the direct line by marrying a parallel cousin ultimately heir to her estate conforms to Moses' dispensation prompted by the case of Zelophehad's daughters: "if a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter" (Num. 27:8) and "every daughter, that possesseth an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may enjoy every man the inheritance of his fathers" (Num. 36:8). This and other scriptural precedents were duly recognised by Irish canon law (*Can. Hib.* XXXII, 19, cf. Ó Corráin, 1985b, 10-2).

According to Binchy the pivotal role ascribed to the king's judgements in early Irish ideology was at best a memory of the distant past: "it is clear that the king has no lawmaking powers as far as the traditional 'sacred' law is concerned. The task of 'finding', interpreting, and applying this devolved first on the Druids (again like the Brahmins in India), later on the *filid*, lit. 'seers', a learned caste who preserved and transmitted all the native lore in verse, later still on a more specialized caste (doubtless an offshoot from the *filid*) of professional jurists, the 'brehons' (Ir. *brithemain*, lit. 'makers of judgements'). In the period with which we are concerned here, these are the custodians and interpreters of the law, which, once it has been 'found', is regarded as the permanent and immutable formulation of ancestral wisdom" (1970, 16).

It will be argued later (ch. 5, 8) that the evidence for the king's judicial functions in early Christian Ireland is too extensive to be so lightly dismissed, but this contention is, of course, quite compatible with the simultaneous existence of a class of professional jurists capable of giving the king expert advice in suits brought before him and of trying others themselves. Druids may have performed such a function among the early Celts, but their judicial supremacy in first-century B.C. Gaul could presumably be an innovation connected with the recent decline of monarchy there (e.g. Caesar, *B.G.* I, 2-4 and 16(5); VI, 20; cf. de Vries, 1961, 234-5). There is no

good evidence that druids acted as judges in pre-Christian Ireland, and references in medieval Irish sources to an erstwhile poets' monopoly of legal utterance are more likely to be aetiologies of the role of the so-called "poet's judgement (*breth filed*)" consisting of *roscad* (see chs. 1,10 and 2, 6-8) in legal composition than even a dim recollection of historical fact (McCone, 1986c, 13).

All that can be usefully said on this topic is that Saint Patrick himself admits to facilitating his mission by means of payments made to kings (*regibus*) and to those "who used to judge among all the regions (*illis qui iudicabant per omnes regiones*)" in sections 53-4 of his fifth-century Confession (Hood, 1978, 33). While this might conceivably refer to druids, poets or the like in a putative judicial capacity, it seems a good deal more probable that specialised practitioners of law are intended. This evidence and the linguistically old ogam form *velitas* = Old Irish *filed* "of a poet" (cf. Thurneysen, 1946, 58) suggest that both the *brithemain* and the *filid* had already emerged as distinct professional categories prior to the advent of Christianity, when the pagan druid presumably still ruled the roost. That being so, it is hard to see how they can usefully be regarded as his more or less direct heirs (cf. ch. 1, 9), particularly when contemporary seventh- and eighth-century sources rigidly distinguish them from the still surviving, if marginalized, pagan druid (ch. 9, 12-4). The details of their institutional and cultural assimilation to the increasingly ascendant Church by the seventh century (ch. 1, 10-12) cannot now be recovered, but this contemporary symbiosis was a major concern of early Christian Irish *literati*, who devised appropriate aetiological narratives and ideological models to account for it. Regardless of what proportion of historical fact or fiction, pagan or Christian elements may have gone into them, modern scholars would do well to take these efforts and their implications seriously.

2. The eighth- or ninth-century legal tract *Uraicecht Becc* distinguishes between an upper *sóer-nemed* and lower *dóer-nemed* category of immune persons (cf. McCone, 1984d, 48-50). In addition to the landowning lords (*flaithi*) and freemen (*féini*) the former comprises clerics (*ecalsa*) and poets (*filid*), while the latter consists of "the people of every art besides (*áes cacha dána olchenae*)" (*CIH* 1593.4-10). The text goes on to enumerate those *dóer-nemid* with independent status as follows: "wrights (*saír*), blacksmiths (*gobainn*), braziers (*umaidi*), workers of precious metals (*cerda*), leeches (*legi*), judges (*brithemain*), druids (*druid*) and the people of every art besides" (ibid., 1612.4-9). The more detailed subsequent exposition introduces the "judge of three judgements" whose qualifications include Latin (1612.23-6, see ch. 1, 11), the master wright (*ollam suad sáer*) whose omnicompetence must include an ability to build churches according to the accompanying glosses (1612.27-35), the head of a monastic school (*suí litre*) with status equal to that of a petty king (1615.4-5), and his various subordinates in ecclesiastical Latin learning (*léigend*) with lower but still appreciable rank (1615.6-19). On the other hand, even a master (*ollam*) of metalwork or leechcraft does not exceed the status of a middle-ranking Latin scholar, poet, judge or wright (1613.9-16). Wrights specializing in making oratories, different types of boat, mills or artefacts of yew enjoy middle rank but combinations of two, three or all four of these can increase their status by up to double (1615.22-1616.16). Low ranking wrights include chariot-makers, house-builders, decorators, engravers and shield-coverers (1616.17-21), but two of these crafts may be combined to obtain a modest increase to the same status

as a master harpist (1616.22-4 and 31-6). Finally, the lowest independent rank of all is reserved for ring-makers, leather-workers, fullers and fishermen (1616.24-6).

This list reveals a thoroughly composite Irish *áes dáno* dominated by professions essential, although mostly by no means exclusive, to the Church. Indeed, it is followed in the *Uraicecht Becc* by a statement that most of the professions in question might be practised by clerics or their dependents as well as by laymen without prejudice to their existing status: "any profession (*dán*), then, that we have said merits independent status [lacuna?] and does not impair the free status that he has without a profession (*dán*), if he should maintain (one), whether he be in lay society (*i túaith*) or the Church (*in eclais*)" (*CIH* 1616.37-1617.4 = 2333.23-9).

Reference has already been made to patronage of poets by kings and nobles of the *túath* (end of ch. 1, 11, and Breatnach, 1987, 89-94), and the legal tract *Críth Gablach*, for example, refers to a secular kindred's dealings with king, Church and *óes cerdd* (ll. 280-2, here = *áes dáno*) as well as to poets, harpers and a judge (*éccis, cruitti* at l. 591, *brithem* at l. 595) in a king's house on the occasion of a feast.

As early medieval Ireland's largest concentrations of population, the monasteries were major centres for crafts and trades as well as scholarship, as is amply demonstrated by the impressive ecclesiastical buildings, metal artefacts and manuscripts still surviving. Thus the valuable vignettes of life in an important monastery like Kildare to be found in Cogitosus' seventh-century Latin Life of Saint Brigit include the abbot's supervision of workers and stonemasons in the provision of a millstone for the community's mill (pars. 34-6; Bollandus, 1658, 135-41) and the efforts of wrights (*artifices*) under the supreme *ollam* of their craft in Ireland (*doctor et omnium praevius artificum Hibernensium*) to repair a great door in the magnificent church with its lavish decorations of gold, silver, gems, painting and fabrics (pars. 37-8). A similar contemporary reality is reflected in a probably late ninth-century coda to the Tripartite Life of Patrick (Mulchrone, 1939, 155), which includes a judge (*brithem*), a bodyguard (*trénfer*), a singer of psalms (*salmchétlaid*), a doorkeeper (*astire*), a cook, a brewer, a charioteer, a woodcutter, three blacksmiths (*gobainn*), three metalworkers (*cerda*) and three seamstresses in the household of the saint and his successors in the Armagh abbacy.

Evidence for monastic schools of law, history and poetry as well as Latin learning has already been given (ch. 1, 10-11), and there is no shortage in hagiographical material of prototypes for the practice of medicine and metalwork in a monastic context. Typical figures of this ilk are bishop Assicus alias Tassach, Patrick's bronzesmith (*faber aereus*) responsible for making various ecclesiastical items, in Tírechán 22(1) (Bieler, 1979, 140, cf. 252 and 211), Saint Brigit's chief smith (*primcherd*) bishop Conláed (Stokes, 1905, 128), the saintly leech (*lieig*) Áed mac Bricc (e.g. *Bethu Brigte* ll. 270-1) and that gifted healer, metalworker and scribe Saint Daig of Inishkeen (see ch. 7, 2). Indeed, glosses on *Félire Óengusso* Aug. 18 mention "the three chief smiths of Ireland (*tri primcherda Hérenn*), namely Tassach with Patrick and Conláed with Brigit and Daig with Ciarán, three bishops they" and further claim that Saint Ciarán of Saigir's chief smith (*primcherd*) Daig was a blacksmith (*goba*), metalworker (*cerd*), and scribe (*scríbnid*) who "made three hundred bells and three hundred croziers and three hundred gospels" (Stokes, 1905, 186). Also worth noting is the *AU* obit for the year 1110 of "Ferdomnach Dall, *fer léiginn* of Kildare", whom an interlinear gloss further describes as a "master harpist (*suí cruitirechta*)".

As relatively compact and privileged religious communities of clerics, scholars, lawyers, poets, artisans, musicians and so on within various larger territories under secular control, early Ireland's monasteries could readily be compared with and modelled upon the levitical cities and cities of refuge (*urbes fugitivorum*), the setting aside of which amidst the different tribes of Israel is described in the Pentateuch (e.g. Num. 35) and Joshua (20 and 21). As Ó Corráin has recently demonstrated at length (1987, 296-307), the concept of the monastic *civitas refugii* or *cathair attaig* "city of refuge" with levitical connotations drawn from the Old Testament is not only well developed in early Irish canon and vernacular law but is also applied as early as the seventh century by Cogitosus and the Book of the Angel to the great churches of Kildare and Armagh.

In a slightly earlier article a cogent general argument has been made in support of the revolutionary contention "that a large party in the Irish church in the seventh and eighth centuries consciously conceived of the mandarin caste of churchmen, scholars, jurists, canon lawyers, historians and poets, to which they belonged, as priests and levites in the strict Old Testament sense of these terms" (Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 1984, 394). As the discussion there makes clear by means of appropriate references (ibid., 394-6), in the Bible this is represented as a hereditary class tracing descent from Levi, the priesthood being reserved specifically for Aaron's lineage amongst them. Consecrated to the service of God, the tribe of Levi did not share in the general division of the land among the other twelve tribes, being allocated special cities and their environs along with tithes, firstlings, first fruits and sacrificial offerings from which to live instead. These sources of ecclesiastical income are duly stressed in the early Irish legal tracts (ibid., 406-12; cf. ch. 1, 11), and in his edition of *Uraicecht na Ríar* Breatnach has discussed the importance of inheritance from father to son to certain professions, especially that of poet or *fili* (1987, 94-8). Thus, according to par. 4 of the text, "if he be not the son of a poet, however, or a grandson (*manip mac filed, immurgu, nó aue*) only half honour-price goes to him, as Irish law says: only half honour-price goes to sages if it is not to a family (of sages) that they are born (*ní tét acht lethdíre do suídib, manip do chlaind genatar*)" (ibid., 104), while a *Bretha Nemed* tract states "for he who is not the child of a noble, or a poet, or a learned churchman (*ar nadbi clann airech, nó filed, nó ecnai*) sues only for half honour-price until he serve learning doubly" (ibid., 46).

1 Chronicles is especially rich in details about the various levitical functions in the royal period. Thus we find particular families of them designated doorkeepers (*ianitores*, 9:17f.), storekeepers and cooks (9:28f.), singers and musicians (*cantores*, 15:16f.), recorders and glorifiers of God's deeds (16:4), superintendents and judges (*praepositorum autem et iudicum*, 23:4), scribes (24:6), treasurers (26:20f.), as well as individuals charged with prophecy in song or to the accompaniment of a harp (15:22, 25:3). 2 Chronicles describes the adornment of the temple by carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, braziers and workers in gold and silver (24:12-4) as well as restoration work by carpenters and masons (*artificibus et cementariis*) under the supervision of Levites (34:10f.). Moreover, we are told that king Jehosaphat revived the fear of God in his subjects by sending out princes, Levites and priests who "taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord, and went about through all the cities of Judah and taught the people" (*docebantque in Iuda habentes librum legis Domini et circuibant cunctas urbes Iuda atque erudiebant populum*, 17:9).

There was, then, no lack of Old Testament analogues for a wide ranging and meticulously subdivided bipartite class of clergy and 'paraclerics', so to speak, capable of functioning either in their own separate communities or in society at large under its king as occasion demanded. Old Irish legal glosses seeking to justify a particular practice display a clear awareness of the levitical status of judges by claiming that "the People of God had ten judges in the ten principal cities of refuge (*bátar .x. mbreithemain la túaith nDé isna .x. prímchathrachaib ataig*)" (Ó Corráin, 1987, 300), and a good deal of evidence has been adduced to show that "in laying down the rules governing the priesthood, the Irish canonists follow the rules of the Pentateuch very closely" (Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 1984, 396-9). Poets, clerics and, apparently, monastic tenants were distinguished from the laity in general by a requirement of monogamy and sexual abstinence at appropriate points in the Church calendar (ibid., 400-4). Thus a well known short Old Irish narrative from the early ninth-century Book of Armagh has Patrick seeking to implement the prescription of 1 Timothy 3:2 that "a bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife (*oportet ergo episcopum inreprehensibilem ese unius uxoris virum*)" by appointing a "free man of good family without defect, without blemish . . . a man of one wife to whom has been born only one child" as first bishop of Leinster and finding a poet to fit the bill (Bieler, 1979, 176). This brief tale clearly implies a close relationship between the two orders, as do the close parallelism between poetic and ecclesiastical grades, poet's satire and saint's curse discussed earlier (ch. 1, 11). Moreover, Leviticus (21:17f.) explicitly forbids physical blemish (*macula*) in the case of a priest, and "it is evident that the legal prescriptions which govern the poet's married life derive directly from canonistic thinking and if one may judge by the terminology used, from the Apostolic Canons read in the light of Leviticus" (Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 1984, 403).

Such considerations point to the following conclusion: "there was, it seems, a 'tribe of the church' with differing orders, grades and functions; it was consciously modelled on the tribe of Levi, it formed a network of interlocking jurisdictions within and among the local kingdoms of early Ireland - and these kingdoms could be seen now as the tribes of Israel, now as the kingdom of David and Solomon" (ibid., 405). If so, this background should be reflected in aetiological narratives about the establishment of the law and learned class or *áes dáno* appropriate to early Christian Ireland.

3. Tírechán represents Patrick as fasting for forty days and forty nights after the fashion of Moses, Elijah and Christ (*Moysaicam tenens disciplinam et Heliacam et Christianam*, 38(1)). Muirchú too likens certain of the saint's actions explicitly to those of Christ (I 19, 2) or Moses (II 5, 1) and implicitly to those of Elijah (I 20, 9-13, cf. ch. 2, 3), with whom he shares a penchant for self-fulfilling predictions about the demise of recalcitrant monarchs' dynasties (e.g. I 21, 2 and 1/3 Kgs. 21:21). Further striking similarities to Moses are alleged by the Supplementary Notes to Tírechán (Bieler, 1979, 165). The national apostle thus merits comparison not only with the greatest lawgiver and prophet of the Old Testament but also, as instrument of the Irish people's salvation, with the Saviour of mankind himself, whose own status as supreme teacher and prophet in the New Testament was given due typological emphasis through association with Moses and Elijah (e.g. Matth. 17:3f., Heb. 3:1f.). Indeed the Irish Canons make the commonplace allegorical and

typological claim that "Aaron represented the supreme priest, namely the bishop, and his sons presaged the figure of priests (*prespiterorum*), but Moses intimated the figure of Christ" (*Can. Hib.* I, 3).

In Muirchú's account the pagan nobility and men of art surrounding king Lóegaire of Tara are generally hostile to Patrick's mission, and reluctant conversion of the monarch and many of his followers (I 21) is only brought about after considerable displays of strength by the saint. However, there are two notable exceptions to this pattern of resistance, namely Erc mac Dego (I 17, 3) and Dubthach maccu Lugair accompanied by his young pupil Fíacc (I 19, 3-4), each of whom on separate occasions alone of a large company rose as a mark of respect before Patrick to accept the faith and the saint's blessing.

Erc, "whose remains are now adored in that monastery which is called Slane", is identified as the founder of that famous centre for *brethemnas* 'judgement' in the early period (see end of ch.1, 10), and it comes as no surprise that he himself was accordingly regarded as Patrick's judge. Thus the catalogue of members of Patrick's household at the end of the Tripartite Life includes "bishop Erc, his judge (*a breithem*)", and there seems no reason to doubt that this tradition was already current in the seventh century, when Muirchú wrote, as can be proved with reference to Patrick's smith Tassach in the same list (see 2 above). Dubthach maccu Lugair, on the other hand, was a famous *fili* traditionally associated with the Uí Cheinnselaig of South Leinster (McCone, 1986b, 29-31) and is explicitly called a "most excellent poet (*poetam optimum*)" by Muirchú.

It has already been demonstrated that among those professions of the *áes dáno* regarded as having pre-Christian roots particular importance attached to the *fili* (whose functions could subsume those of the *senchaid*) and the *brithem* in the monastic literature (ch. 1, 10-11). That being so, as Thurneysen saw in Dubthach's case (1921, 67), Muirchú's account is to be seen as an aetiology ascribing the privileged status of these two callings to their particularly close and early association with the Church. As has been pointed out by Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen (1984, 389-90), Muirchú's statement "and he believed first on that day in God and it was reckoned to him for justice (*crediditque primus in illa die Deo et repputatum est ei ad iustitiam*)" regarding Dubthach is a close echo of Genesis 15:6 about Abraham (*credidit Domino et reputatum est ei ad iustitiam*), which is cited by Saint Paul (Rom. 4:3) as part of an argument for justification by faith rather than the law. Indeed, this quotation may well be a cue drawing attention to a context containing the famous Pauline dictum echoed in the title of this chapter: "but now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested being witnessed by the law and the prophets (*nunc autem sine lege iustitia Dei manifestata est testificata a lege et prophetis*)" (Rom. 3:21 – cf. the role of Moses and Elijah as witnesses of Christ's transfiguration in Matth. 17:2-3). It is probably, then, in accordance with this scheme that Muirchú represents a lawyer, Erc, and a prophet, Dubthach, as the first witnesses to the new faith brought by Patrick, the implication surely being that pre-Patrician law and poetry were related to the Christian dispensation in Ireland in much the same way as the law and the prophets of the Old Testament were to the New Testament in the Bible.

Moreover, this pattern of faithful individuals standing out from a larger company of non-believers might be compared with Christ's call of a disciple like Matthew (Matth. 9:9-10) alias Levi (Mark 2:14-5, Luke 6:27-9) or, indeed, with the

inauguration of the Levites as a tribe devoted to God's service by responding to Moses' plea "if anyone is of the Lord let him be joined to me" (Ex. 32:26) and helping God's agent to suppress the worship of the golden calf.

Since the trio of Patrick, Dubthach and Lóegaire is at the heart of further evolved juristic accounts of the establishment of the current system of Irish law under the saint's auspices, it seems desirable to offer a brief summary and some elaboration of points made in greater detail elsewhere regarding the early genesis of this potent syncretistic myth (McCone, 1982, 143-4; 1984, 321-3; 1984b, 54-5).

It is tolerably clear from Muirchú's prologue that his Life of Saint Patrick was written at Áed of Sletty's prompting in order to provide Armagh with a counter to the claims recently made by Cogitosus for Kildare. Indeed, the expansionist aspirations of his Kildare neighbours obviously alarmed Áed sufficiently for him to seek protection by submitting his monastery to Armagh during the abbacy of Ségéne, i.e. between 661 and 688 A.D. Since Tírechán and Muirchú both deliberately bring Sletty's founder Fíacc into contact with Patrick, it seems that they wrote after Áed's action. Indeed, the otherwise strange appearance of a poet like Dubthach associated with the bitterly hostile Laigin at the court of an Uí Néill king of Tara was presumably an invention of Muirchú's in order to give the newly allied Áed's monastery a plug in the person of Dubthach's alleged pupil, the young Fíacc, whose subsequent foundation of Sletty is duly emphasised by the hagiographer.

Tírechán's reference to "most recent plagues (*mortalitates novissimas*)" (25,2) suggests that he wrote within a few years of the recurrent plague known as *Buide Conaill* that afflicted Ireland from 664-8 A.D. (e.g. *AU*). Since he has king Lóegaire remain a pagan (12) rather than becoming a reluctant convert to Christianity as in Muirchú's dramatic version, which rapidly became the standard account, Tírechán seems likely to have written either before or at about the same time as Muirchú. The most probable explanation for the tradition of Lóegaire's conversion not yet being in circulation when Tírechán wrote would be that the imaginative Muirchú invented it as part of a representation of the king that owed a good deal to those biblical despots Nebuchadnezzar, Darius and Herod (cf. ch. 2, 3).

As Liam Breatnach has shown in an important recent study (1986), the fragmentarily preserved legal tract *Cáin Fuithirbe*, the composition of which can be confidently dated within a couple of years or so of 680 on the strength of various fairly minor figures named in connection with its promulgation, contained references to the high king's conflict with Patrick and ultimate conversion that are presumably derived from Muirchú. That being so, we may assume that Sletty's submission to Armagh took place relatively early in Ségéne's long abbacy and that Muirchú and Tírechán produced their broadly complementary works in the Armagh interest in the 670s.

The main historical axis of Muirchú's work is provided by Patrick and Lóegaire at Tara, whose roles are explicitly and allusively likened to those of Christ and Herod in Jerusalem in the Gospels but given typological depth by additional comparisons with Old Testament figures. This scheme is obviously conditioned by the synthetic historical approach to Irish history as a microcosm of Christian world history centred on the coming of the faith (ch. 3, 9). The roles of Erc and Dubthach as representatives of the pre-Christian law and prophets bearing witness to the new dispensation are as yet relatively minor, but that of Dubthach in particular soon underwent major expansion in legal circles.

4. Unfortunately it is not clear whether *Cáin Fuithirbe* contained any reference to a review of the law by Patrick or ascribed any role to Dubthach in this process. However, the Old Irish law tract *Do Fastad Cirt ⁊ Dligid* does allude rather laconically to legal rules established by Patrick in Lóegaire's reign and to "their truth of nature and of conscience and of scripture (*a fír n-aicnid ⁊ coibse ⁊ screptra*)" (*CIH* 240.22; McCone, 1986c, 23), glossed "of the righteous men", "of the Christians" and "holy, of the head of a monastic school (*in fir léigind*)" respectively. This threefold establishment of truth by conformity to nature, scripture and conscience obviously derives from Saint Augustine as cited in the Irish Canons: *tribus modis agnoscitur omne verum, cum non venit contra naturam, et verbis scripturae conveniat, et animis prudentium non distinguat* (*Can. Hib.* XXII, 5).

A more detailed account of the activities of Patrick and his associates is given in the probably early eighth-century tract *Córus Béscnai*: "each law is bound. It is in this that the two laws have been bound together. It is the law of nature (*recht aicnid*) that was with the men of Ireland until the coming of the faith in the time of Lóegaire son of Níall. It is in his time that Patrick came. It is after the men of Ireland had believed in Patrick that the two laws were harmonised, the law of nature (*recht aicnid*) and the law of the letter (*recht litre*). Dubthach maccu Lugair the poet (*in fili*) displayed the law of nature. It is Dubthach who first paid respect to Patrick. It is he who first rose before him in Tara. It is Corc son of Lugaid who first bowed before him. He was in hostageship with Lóegaire. Lóegaire, then, refused Patrick on account of the druid Matha son of Umor. He, the druid, had prophesied to Lóegaire that Patrick would steal the living and the dead from him. Cairid son of Findcháem first bowed to him after him, as he was a poet (*fili*) of Lóegaire's. Erc, he is the first person who rose before Patrick at Ferta Fer Féige on the edge of the Boyne, and their prohibition was felled . . . Dubthach maccu Lugair the poet (*in fili*) recounted the judgements of the men of Ireland according to the law of nature and the law of the prophets (*recht fáide*). For prophecy according to the law of nature (*fáidsine a recht aicnid*) had prevailed in the judgement of the island of Ireland and in her poets. Prophets among them, then, had foretold that the blessed white language (*bélrae bán biáid*, glossed *in léigend*) shall come, i.e. the law of the letter, (and) that there are many things according to the law of nature that have reached what the law of the letter has not reached. Dubthach, then, showed (this) to Patrick. What did not contradict the word of God in the law of the letter and the consciences of Christians was harmonized in the order of judges by the Church and poets. All the law of nature was right except for the faith and its due, and (there was) joining of Church to state" (*CIH* 527.14-529.4).

The three key concepts of the law of nature, the law of the letter and the law of the prophets in the above passage recur in a rather different context in the Stowe Missal tract on the Mass: "what is chanted of the Mass thereafter, both introit and prayers and addition, as far as the lesson of the Apostles (the Epistle) and the Gradual, that is a figure of the law of nature (*recht aicnid*), wherein Christ has been renewed through all His members and deeds. The Epistle, however, and the Gradual, and from this to the uncovering (of the chalice), it is a commemoration of the law of the letter (*recht litre*) wherein Christ has been figured, only that what has been figured therein was not yet known. The uncovering, so far as half, of the host and the chalice and what is chanted thereat, both Gospel and Allelulia as far as *oblata*, it is a commemoration of the law of the prophets (*recht fáthe*). Wherein

Christ was manifestly foretold, save that it was not seen until he was born. The elevation of the chalice after the full uncovering thereof *quando canitur oblata*, that is a commemoration of Christ's birth and of his glory through signs and miracles" (*Thes.* II 252-3).

The four phases here related by a conventional typological process to Christ's coming clearly refer to the biblical sequence of the pre-Mosaic period of the patriarchs, the law, the prophets and the New Testament. Indeed, this is precisely the scheme presented by that major but hitherto unpublished eighth-century Irish exegetical tract on the Bible from Genesis to Revelation known as the *Bibelwerk* or Reference Bible: *quod sunt leges principales et unde incipit et finit unaquaeque de eis? Lex naturae et lex litterae, lex prophetiae et lex evangelii. Incipit lex naturae ab Adam usque Moysen, lex litterae a Moysen usque ad Samuhel, lex prophetiae a Samuel usque ad Iohannem Baptistae, lex evangelii ab Iohanne usque ad finem mundi* "what are the main laws and whence does each of them begin and end? The law of nature and the law of the letter, the law of prophecy and the law of the Gospel. The law of nature begins from Adam to Moses, the law of the letter from Moses to Samuel, the law of prophecy from Samuel to John the Baptist, the law of the Gospel from John to the end of the world" (McNamara, 1987, 89). Furthermore, Isidore gives the traditional definition of the first two orders of the Old Testament as the Law comprising the whole Pentateuch ascribed to Moses, and the Prophets consisting of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings (or 1 and 2 Kings), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezechiel plus the twelve minor prophets, but sets the pre-Mosaic section of the Pentateuch apart by stating that "what was given through Moses, however, is properly called the Law" (*Etym.* VI i 5). The standard scheme here and in the Reference Bible is precisely mirrored in Fintan mac Bóchra's poem in *Do Suidigud Tellaich Temra*, par. 12, on great judgements in Ireland (ch. 3, 11):

4.	*Dálais Moyse, monar nglé*	Moses delivered, bright deed,
	bretha lánmaithi litre	perfect judgements of the letter.
	dális Duid ar sine	David delivered according to age
	bretha fíra fáitsine	true judgements of prophecy.
11.	*Iarsin ro:génair in gein*	Thereafter was born the child
	hÍsu ó Muiri ingein	Jesus from maiden Mary,
	co tárfas bretha co mbail	and judgements were shown with goodness
	tria núfíadnaise nóemgloin	through his holy pure new testament.

In the legal context *recht aicnid* and *recht fáithe* are said to have been in operation before the coming of Patrick, who brought *recht litre* with him and harmonized the pre-existing Irish law with this. From a legal standpoint the fundamental terms are *recht litre* and *recht aicnid*, which forms the basis of the typologically oriented *recht fáithe*, pre-Christian utterances foretelling the coming of the new dispensation.

According to Binchy, "it is true that some comparative legal historians have claimed to note an echo of classical Roman jurisprudence in the term *recht aicnid* 'the law of nature' which figures among the 'sources' of the *Senchas Már*. But though this expression is undoubtedly borrowed from Latin - more probably from patristic than from legal literature - it has in Irish a totally different meaning from that of *ius naturale* (or *ius naturae*) in the works of Ulpian or Pomponius or the

Stoic philosophers from whom the classical jurists took the idea" (1983, 13). In the discussion (ch. 3, 10) of Cormac mac Art's precocious belief in God and righteous pre-Patrician judgements attention was drawn to the centrality of the Pauline concept that from the beginning God stood revealed in his creation for those with eyes to see. Allied with the apparently native Irish belief that the righteousness or otherwise of judgements was liable to be manifested by a favourable or adverse reaction on the part of nature at large (see 1 above and McLeod, 1982, 358-62), this may have contributed to the fundamental early medieval Irish idea of a pre-Patrician *recht aicnid* or 'law of nature' that proved largely compatible with the later Christian dispensation.

Nevertheless, the relevance of the classical Roman juristic concept of natural law, at least as modified in the light of Paul's specialized use of it in Romans 2:14-5, should not be underrated. For instance, the second-century A.D. Roman jurisconsult Gaius gives the basic definition as follows at the beginning of his well known *Institutiones*: "all peoples that are governed by laws and customs (*qui legibus et moribus reguntur*) use partly their own law and partly the common law of all men, for the law that each people has established for itself is proper to itself and is called civil law (*ius civile*), in the sense of law proper to the state, but what natural reason (*ratio naturalis*) has established among all men, that is observed equally among all peoples and is called the law of peoples (*ius gentium*), in the sense of law that all nations use". Saint Paul's crucial reformulation in response to the question of faith and the Mosaic law was as follows: *cum autem gentes quae legem non habent naturaliter quae legis sunt faciunt eiusmodi legem non habentes ipsi sunt sibi lex qui ostendunt opus legis scriptum in cordibus suis testimonium reddente illis conscientia ipsorum* "for when the gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness" (Rom. 2:14-5). Leading up as it does to the discussion in Romans 4 of Abraham's righteousness through faith rather than the circumcision enjoined by Jewish law (see 3 above), this concept of a natural propensity to justice in conformity with the spirit rather than the letter of the Mosaic law could readily be applied to the patriarchal phase of the Old Testament, as in the Stowe Missal tract above.

That influential cleric Isidore, who is inevitably concerned to distinguish between divine and human laws, incorporates a crucial expansion of the dichotomy between specific *ius civile* and more or less general *ius gentium* into a trichotomy comprising a further *ius naturale*, which is not only truly universal but also intrinsically just and hence compatible with God's will: *Omnes autem leges aut divinae sunt, aut humanae. Divinae natura, humanae moribus constant . . . Ius autem naturale [est] aut civile aut gentium. Ius naturale [est] commune omnium nationum, et quod ubique instinctu naturae non constitutione aliqua habetur . . . Nam hoc, aut si quid huic simile est, numquam iniustum [est], sed naturale aequumque habetur . . . Ius civile est quod quisque populus vel civitas sibi proprium humana divinaque causa constituit . . . Et inde ius gentium, quia eo iure omnes fere gentes utuntur* "however, all laws are either divine or human. The divine exist by nature, the human by customs . . . Law, however, is natural or civil or of peoples. Natural law is common to all nations and what is held everywhere by the impulse of nature, not by some regulation . . . For this or anything like it is never unjust but is always held to be natural and fair . . . Civil law is what each people or state has established as peculiar

to itself for human or divine reason . . . And thence it is law of peoples, because almost all peoples employ it" (*Etym.* V ii & iv).

It thus seems likely that *recht aicnid* was chiefly modelled upon *ius naturale* as defined by Isidore and could, with Saint Paul's help, be compared with the pre-Mosaic dispensation in Israel during the patriarchal period. Moreover, Martin McNamara has recently drawn attention to an illuminating passage on *lex naturae* in the Reference Bible apparently reflecting Eucherius' influence: "why did the Lord give the law only to the one people of the Jews? That is, not to one alone but in anticipation he gave the law of nature to all men, through which many good men emerged, like Enoch and Noah and Abraham and out of that ancestry and their deserts they were the sons of Israel and deserved to receive the law of the letter when the law of nature passed" (1987, 94).

According to Isidore *Moyses gentis Hebraicae primus omnium divinas leges sacris litteris explicavit* "Moses of the Hebrew race was the first of all to expound divine laws in sacred letters" (*Etym.* V i 1). Moreover, etymologically writing was held to be of the very essence of *lex* 'law, ordinance' as opposed to *ius* 'law, justice' and *mos* 'custom': *ius autem dictum, quia iustum. Omne autem ius legibus et moribus constat. Lex est constitutio scripta. Mos est vetustate probata consuetudo, sive lex non scripta. Nam lex a legendo vocata, quia scripta est* "justice, however, is (so) called because it is just. Moreover, all justice consists of laws and customs. Law is a written regulation. Custom is a usage tried by age or an unwritten law. For law is (so) called from reading, because it is written" (ibid. V iii 2). These considerations appear to be reflected in the Irish Canons' simple use of *lex* to refer to Pentateuch law.

In the first instance, then, *recht litre* refers to the written Mosaic law, as is clearly the case in the Reference Bible, Fintan's poem and the Stowe Missal tract above. However, allusion there to Christ's being prefigured in that law is in perfect accord with the New Testament doctrine that the Old Testament law had been brought to fulfilment by Christ, whose Sermon on the Mount is obviously meant to echo Moses' promulgation of the old law before the assembled tribes of Israel. Jesus, indeed, declares his basic respect for the Old Testament dispensation as follows: *nolite putare quoniam veni solvere legem aut prophetas. Non veni solvere sed adimplere. Amen quippe dico vobis donec transeat caelum et terra iota unum aut unus apex non praeteribit a lege donec omnia fiant* "think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matth. 5:17-8).

In relation to Irish law Patrick was cast in a composite role drawn from the two typologically interlocking biblical figures with whom he was most persistently compared: like Moses in ancient Israel he was the divinely inspired promulgator of the first written law, but at the same time he resembled Christ as bringer of the full evangelical dispensation by now embodied in the whole Bible and the Church's subsequent teaching. Consequently the *recht litre* brought to Ireland by Patrick was represented as historically analagous to the biblical law of Moses and Christ, but in practice also included other ecclesiastical learning and could be glossed *léigend* '(written) Latin learning' or the like (see above). Like Christ in Israel, Patrick was said on arrival in Ireland to have been confronted by a worthy pre-existing system of law and prophets, termed *recht aicnid* and *recht fáithe* in the senses intimated

earlier. In keeping with this model, he supposedly treated these with respect and, rather than abrogating them, brought them to fulfilment in harmony with the Church's *recht litre* and the Christian conscience (see first paragraph above).

It can thus be seen that the evolution of early Irish law, like and, indeed, in conjunction with the periodization of Ireland and her Gaelic conquerors' history (see ch. 3, 7-10), was being consciously represented along biblical lines by monastic *literati* from at least the seventh century onwards. This process is made still more explicit in the full narrative account of Patrick's review of Ireland's law and institutions.

5. In a recent article the present writer has discussed the various extant recensions of the so-called 'pseudo-historical' prologue to the great compilation of vernacular Irish law called *Senchus Már* (McCone, 1986c, 1-5), has offered a translation of what seems to be the prologue's original core (ibid., 5-10) along with an analysis of its contents (ibid., 10-8), and has argued for an early eighth-century date roughly contemporary with the *Senchus Már* as a whole (ibid., 18-28) before presenting a text with commentary of Dubthach maccu Lugair's central judgement in *roscad* (ibid., 29-35). Since this more detailed treatment is available for reference, it will be sufficient here to draw attention to a number of salient features of this important text, which fleshes out the narrative details underlying the passage from the *Senchus Már* tract *Córus Béscnai* cited in the first paragraph of section 4 above.

The narrative proper begins with king Lóegaire urging the murder of one of Patrick's followers in order to test the saint's position on the Christian law of forgiveness. The king's brother Núadu duly slays Patrick's charioteer Odrán. Terrified by an earthquake and darkness resulting from the angry saint's invocation of his God, the men of Ireland offered Patrick arbitration and his choice of judge. This fell upon 'the chief poet of the island of Ireland', Dubthach maccu Lugair, 'who was a vessel full of the Holy Spirit'. Dubthach lamented the apparent unavoidability of offending either Patrick by recommending forgiveness or God by opting for retribution in the teeth of the Gospels' injunction to forgive one's neighbour, but this fear was assuaged by a guarantee that God would speak through him after his mouth had been blessed by the saint. Dubthach then utters a long *roscad* replete with arguments drawn from Scripture and advocates a compromise between the claims of punishment and forgiveness by sentencing Núadu's body to death for his crime but granting God's mercy upon his soul. A note then adds that this arrangement succeeded a previous system of full retribution but that, since Patrick is no longer available to guarantee the divine side of the bargain, the current compromise is a wergild payment (*éraic*) for culpable homicide.

Patrick then summoned the men of Ireland to an assembly, preached the Gospel and demonstrated his miraculous powers to them, so that they "acknowledged the whole will of God and Patrick". Lóegaire called for "the establishment and arrangement of every law among us", and "it is then that all the men of art (*áes dána*) in Ireland were assembled so that each displayed his craft (*a cheird*) in the presence of Patrick before every lord in Ireland. It is then, indeed, that it was entrusted to Dubthach to show the judgement and all the poetry of Ireland (*tasfénad breithemnusa ⁊ uile filidechta Érenn*) and whatever law had held sway among the men of Ireland in the law of nature and in the judgements of the island of Ireland and in the poets (*i recht aicnid ⁊ i mbrethaib innse Érend ⁊ i filedaib*), who had prophesied that the white language that shall be would come, i.e. the law of the letter

(*recht litre*). For (it is) the Holy Spirit that had spoken and prophesied through the mouths of the righteous men who had formerly been in the island of Ireland (*tria ginu na fer fíréon ceta:rabatar in inis Érenn*), as it had prophesied through the mouths of the righteous men and the patriarchs in the law of the Old Testament (*tria ginu na fer fíréon ⁊ na n-úasalaithre i recht petarlaice*). For the law of nature had covered much that the law of the letter had not reached. The judgements of true nature (*inna bretha fíraicnid*), then, that the Holy Spirit had uttered through the mouths of righteous judges and poets (*tria ginu breithemon ⁊ filed fíréon*) of the men of Ireland from when this island was settled up to the (coming of the) faith, Dubthach showed them all to Patrick. Of whatever belonged to the law of nature apart from faith and its due and the joining of Church to state, then, that which did not conflict with the word of God in the law of the letter and the New Testament (*fri bréithir nDé i recht litre ⁊ núfíadnaise*) and with the consciences of Christians was joined in the regulation of judgement by Patrick and the churchmen and lords of Ireland. So that it is the *Senchus Már*. Nine men, then, were selected for the drawing up of this book, namely the three bishops Patrick and Benén and Cairnech, the three kings Lóegaire, Corc and Daire, Ros mac Tricim the expert in legal language and Dubthach and Fergus the poet. Legal knowledge (*nofis*) is the name of the book that they drew up, i.e. knowledge of nine men, and we encounter narrative illustration of this above. This, then, is the law of Patrick, and no human judge of the Gael can annul anything that he find in the *Senchus Már*" (*CIH* 341.39–342.20).

The final section of the prologue asserts the subordination of historian, poet and judge to ecclesiastical scholar since Patrick's coming (see ch. 1, 11), and describes the alleged earlier breaking of the poets' monopoly over judgement: "since Amairgen White-knee gave the first judgement in Ireland, judgement was in the hands of the poets alone until the colloquy of the two sages in Emain Machae" but the utterance of that pair was so obscure to the listening nobles that, on the Ulster king Conchobor mac Nessa's recommendation, "judgement, therefore, was taken away from the poets apart from their proper part of it, and each of the men of Ireland received his share of the judgement" (*CIH* 342.21-34).

It is to be noted that the relationship between the laws in Ireland is described by virtually the same words in the *Córus Béscnai* passage and the prologue. The latter, however, explicitly compares the divinely inspired natural judgements and prophecies of pre-Patrician Ireland's righteous judges and poets with the inspiration of pre-Christian Israel's righteous men and patriarchs by the Holy Spirit, thus further implying that the old law's subsequent accommodation to the demands of the Bible, particularly the New Testament, and Christian conscience was analagous in both cases. The quasi-biblical scheme of an Irish 'Old Testament' law being adapted with due reverence to the Patrician 'New Testament' could hardly be more clearly expressed (cf. ch. 3, 10).

It has been argued in section 3 above (cf. ch. 2, 3) that Muirchú had already drawn a typological and historical analogy between Patrick and Christ, Lóegaire and Herod, Tara and Jerusalem, while introducing Erc and Dubthach as contemporary individual representatives of the old law and prophets prepared to bear witness to the new. The later juristic versions basically adhere to this scheme but depict the Irish analogues of the Old Testament law and prophets more literally as the *recht aicnid* and *recht fáithe* practised by certain righteous judges (*brithemain*) and poets (*filid*) in the pre-Patrician period.

This shift left the poet Dubthach free to be equated with a major biblical figure of mediation between the Old and New Testaments. John the Baptist functions as both the last representative of the old law and prophets and as Christ's harbinger. Thus Jesus' remarks about him include the following: *omnes enim prophetae et lex usque ad Iohannem prophetaverunt* "for all the prophets and the law prophesied until John" (Matth. 11:13), *sed quid existis videre? prophetam? utique dico vobis et plus quam prophetam. Hic est de quo scriptum est, ecce mitto angelum meum ante faciem tuam qui praeparabit viam tuam ante te* "but what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" (Luke 7:26-7). This, of course, is precisely the kind of role played in the *Senchus Már* prologue by Dubthach maccu Lugair as a representative of the pre-Patrician order of *filid* who is inspired by the Holy Spirit to pave the way for Patrick's teaching.

At the beginning of his ministry "the word of God came unto John (*factum est verbum Dei super Iohannem*) the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentence for the remission of sins (*praedicans baptismum paenitentiae in remissionem peccatorum*); As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight (*parate viam Domini rectas facite semitas eius*)" (Luke 3:2-4, cf. Matth. 3:1-3). This imagery is quite deliberately imitated in Dubthach's case. Thus Patrick's blessing upon his utterance guarantees that the Holy Spirit will speak God's word through him, the first part of his poem concentrates upon the Joannine concerns of baptism, repentance and forgiveness, and the second part opens with a clear echo of Isaiah's prophecy as applied to John, *áiliu Día, dírged mo sét* "I beseech God, let him make my path straight" (McCone, 1986c, 14-5).

Dubthach, of course, functions in this historically framed myth as the perfect prototype of the *fili* in the post-Patrician scheme of things. By virtue of his status as God's mouthpiece and Patrick's ally the poet becomes the leading representative of the *áes dáno* and their activities in relation to the new faith and its requirements. As the brief saga version of these events, *Comthóth Lóegaire*, puts it, "their excesses were, then, put from them therein and they were arranged in their propriety" (*LU* 9774), the implication being that these professions now owe their position to the poet's advocacy and the Church's approval in the persons of Dubthach and Patrick respectively. One is reminded of the Levites' subordination to the priesthood in chapter three of Numbers, and presumably this early Irish narrative is meant to provide a mytho-historical sanction for the restriction of the highest *sóer-nemed* status to churchmen (*ecalsa*) and poets (*filid*), while other types of *áes dáno* are only granted various levels of subordinate *dóer-nemed* status (see 2 above).

The central legal issue in the prologue is whether or not homicide is exempt from Christ's famous modification of the Mosaic code in the Sermon on the Mount: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for and eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matth. 5:38-9). Dubthach's poem deploys much scriptural erudition and sophistry in order to justify the death penalty in such cases, the suggestion being that forgiveness should here apply to the soul rather than the body. Since the actual penalty for homicide in Ireland was usually a wergild

payment, this advocacy of the death penalty seems strange at first sight. However, it was very much in tune with clerical thinking at the time in Ireland and elsewhere. Thus the Irish Canons display considerable enthusiasm for corporal and capital punishment, quoting with approval Jerome's dictum that 'to punish those guilty of homicide or sacrilege is not an effusion of blood but administration of God's laws (*homicidas et sacrilegos punire, non est effusio sanguinis, sed legum Dei ministerium*)" (*Can. Hib.* XXVII 8c., cf. McCone, 1986c, 17-8). It would appear that the Church and her lawyers, having failed to induce the secular aristocracy to abandon the financially advantageous system of wergild, grudgingly acknowledged it as a second-best solution to the problem of culpable homicide.

6. This brings us to the commission of nine appointed to draw up the *Senchus Már*. Consisting as it does of three bishops, three rulers and a trio of poets and judges, this body precisely matches the three constituents of judgement according to *Uraicecht Becc*, namely the churchman's judgement (*breth ecalsa*) based on Scripture, the poet's judgement (*breth filed*) based on maxims (*for roscadaib*) and the ruler's judgment (*breth flatha*) combining both of these with precedents (see ch. 1, 10). Moreover, in early medieval Ireland the *cúl-airecht* or 'back court' as described in a short Old Irish legal text recently edited by Fergus Kelly consisted a king, a bishop and a "sage of every language of an *ollam*", glossed "*ollam* of poets" (1986, 78, 80 and 89-91). Obviously we are dealing with yet another aetiology of contemporary practices and perceptions, the three classes involved being comparable with the priests (*sacerdotes*), Levites (*Levitae*) and princes (*principes*) appointed by the virtuous king Jehosaphat firstly to teach the law among the cities of Judah (2 Chron. 17:7-9) and then to pass judgements in Jerusalem (ibid., 19:8). Still more to the point, perhaps, was a tendency in some Irish exegetical circles, animadverted to by Pádraig Ó Néill (1979, 154), to divide the Old Testament into three periods or orders, namely those of the kings (*reges*), the judges or prophets (*prophetae*) and the priests (*sacerdotes*).

A similar tripartite scheme in the *Uraicecht* focusing upon the traditional law or *fénechus* as a whole rather than the ruler's role in its application speaks of *breth bérla báin* or *léigend, breth filed* or *filidecht* and *breth féni* or *fénechus* (*CIH* 1612.23-6, 1614.31-2). This has its most direct aetiology in the story of how Cenn Fáelad first effected a written vernacular merger of these disciplines in a monastery around the middle of the seventh century (ch. 1, 10).

The so-called 'genuine' prologue to the *Senchus Már* covers much the same ground by giving the following answer to its opening question "the law of the men of Ireland, what has preserved it (*senchus fer nÉrenn cid conid:róeter*)?": "the joint memory of two old men (*comchuimne dá sen*), transmission from one ear to another (*tindnacul clúaise diaraili*), the chanting of poets (*díchetal filed*), increment from law of the letter (*tórmach ó recht litre*), corroboration according to law of nature (*nertad fri recht n-aicnid*), for those are the potent practices in relation to which the judgements of the world are established" (*CIH* 346.24-347.17; Thurneysen, 1927, 175). The first two constituents reflect not only the importance of memory and oral statement for the legal process in Ireland as in other societies, whether literate or non-literate, but also the belief that Irish law was unwritten until the coming of Patrick. The need for such oral testimony to be corroborated matches the biblical precept that "one witness shall not stand against someone (*non stabit testis unus*

contra aliquem) . . . but in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word stand *(sed in ore duorum aut trium testium stabit omne verbum)*" (Deut. 19:15, cited by *Can. Hib.* XVI, 7) or "that the testimony of two men is true *(quia duorum hominum testimonium verum est)*" (John 8:17). The accompanying glosses presumably reflect standard doctrine in identifying the last three elements with the three poets or jurists, the three bishops and the three rulers respectively on the commission charged with drawing up the *Senchus Már*, and a comparison with the passage from *Córus Béscnai* in section 4 above points to the equivalence of *díchetal filed* and *recht fáithe* 'law of the prophets' in the Irish scheme of things.

The combination of ingredients such as these under the Church's aegis as symbolised by Patrick brought into being a new written law for early Christian Ireland in which, as *Cáin Fuithirbe* puts it, "that which is contrary to conscience has been made forfeit by ink *(ro:dilsiged la dub in dícubus)*" (Breatnach, 1986, 52). This seems to contradict the *laisser-faire* approach envisaged by Binchy: 'the introduction of Christianity in the fifth century brought in its wake the art of writing into a society that was still archaic, even primitive. As a result the members of an already powerful and well-organized legal caste were enabled, one might almost say by accident, at an exceptionally early period of social evolution to embody in permanent form the oral tradition that provided the framework of that society' (1973, 22).

Indeed, the passage cited from the 'pseudohistorical' prologue in 5 above makes it clear that, as far as early Ireland's men of letters were concerned, the sacrosanctity of the *Senchus Már* resided in the fact that it was held to be God's law as promulgated by His apostle Patrick. Its status as a repository of pagan ancestral wisdom figures as the major source of its authority only in some modern writings. To the medieval jurists themselves the validity of all Irish law, whether pre- or post-Patrician, depended upon God's inspiration and its apostolically certified compatibility with biblical and Christian teaching as well as nature. As an Old Irish gloss on *Cáin Fuithirbe* puts it, 'let the judges bear in mind, since they are not pagans *(ginnti)*, that they did not transgress as long as they were in periods of unbelief *(i réth écretme*, i.e. before Patrick brought the faith) until ignorance of the baptism of salvation *(anfis bait[se] slái[ne])* destroyed them if they deviated from the law of nature that God had given them *(asind recht aicnid do:rat Día doib)*' (*CIH* 773.5-8; Ó Corráin, 1987, 291). This seems to reflect the Pauline doctrine at the heart of the Epistle to the Romans (especially chapters 4-8) that sin and death came into the world through Adam, that Mosaic law defined and punished offences, but that only faith and baptism in Christ could save man fully from the consequences of sin. However, what matters most for present purposes is the statement that God had granted *recht aicnid* to Ireland's pre-Patrician inhabitants through their righteous judges, a point reiterated by the glossing of *íar fénechus* "according to traditional law" as *.i. íarsin aicniud do:rat Día dúinn* "i.e., according to the (law of) nature that God had given to us" (*CIH* 773.21).

7. Although *recht litre* in the Christian sense was seen as Patrick's gift to Ireland, the continuing validity of much of the *recht aicnid* allegedly in force there hitherto came to be ascribed to rather more than mere general divine promptings through nature. Thus by about the eighth century Irish *literati* were daring to assert that the pre-Patrician Gaels had already been vouchsafed privileged, if indirect, access to *recht litre* according to its strict definition as Mosaic law.

The Harley recension of the 'pseudohistorical' prologue, which may or may not continue the original at this point, has Dubthach explain to Patrick prior to giving judgement in the case of Núadu that "what was before you in Ireland was judgement of law (*breth rechta*), i.e. that was revenge, foot for foot and eye for eye and life for life (*cos i cois ⁊ súil i súil ⁊ anim in anim*)" (*CIH* 340.21-2), an obvious reference to the Old Testament injunction "thou shalt exact life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot (*animam pro anima, oculum pro oculo, dentem pro dente, manum pro manu, pedem pro pede exiges*)" (Deut. 19:21, cf. Ex. 21:23-5). The clear implication is that the pre-Patrician *breth rechta* practised by king Cormac mac Airt (ch. 3, 10) and other righteous men in Ireland was essentially Mosaic (cf. McCone, 1986c, 12).

Indeed, that remarkable Middle Irish synthetic historical compilation *Scél na Fír Flatha* not only echoes aspects of the 'pseudohistorical' prologue's Patrician settlement but also endows its hero Cormac with a distinctly Mosaic aura as ruler presiding over "the most noble assembly that was held in Ireland before the faith, since it is the rules and laws that were made in that gathering that will last in Ireland till Doomsday" (par. 4). These legal activities include the promulgation of twelve ordeals for distinguishing between truth and falsehood. Several of these, namely Morann's three collars (pars. 12-16, cf. ch. 3, 10), Sencha mac Ailella's lot-casting (par. 18), Sen mac Aige's lot-casting (par. 22) and a practice allegedly brought from Israel by Caí Caínbrethach (par. 23), are associated with figures on the H.3.17 recension of the 'pseudohistorical' prologue's list of pre-Patrician authorities. After arranging the laws, Cormac declared a seven-year jubilee (*iubail*) lifted from chapter 25 of Leviticus between one Feast of Tara (*Feis Temro*) or "Passover/Easter of the gentiles/pagans (*cáisc na ngente*)" and the next (par. 55), and this was followed by the authoritative writing of Ireland's histories, genealogies and regnal successions down to that time in the so-called 'Psalter of Cormac' or 'Psalter of Tara', which is thus represented as a kind of Irish Pentateuch (see end of ch. 3, 10).

It has already been seen that the formation of the Irish language under the auspices of Fénius Farsaid was set in Egypt (ch. 2, 4), which the ancestors of the Gael under their leader are said to have left to begin their protracted wanderings to Ireland in the aftermath of the Israelite exodus under Moses (ch. 3, 7). The account of the ordeal introduced by Caí in *Scél na Fír Flatha* shows how this link could be further exploited to provide a plausible explanation for the unnaturally high proportion of Mosaic judgements ascribed to the Irish *recht aicnid* implemented by Cormac and others well before Patrick set foot in Ireland: "now Caí Caínbrethach, the pupil of Fénius Farsaid, the twelfth or seventy-second disciple of the school (cf. Ahlqvist, 1982, 47) which Fénius sent out from Greece in order to learn the many languages throughout the countries of the world, it was that Caí who brought that ordeal with him from the land of Israel, when he had come to the chosen people (*túath Dé*) and had learned the Law of Moses. And it was he that used to deliver judgements in the school after it had been gathered from every side and it was he that ordained the *Breth Caí*. It was the same Caí moreover who first ordained in Ireland the law of the four tracks [= *Cethirslicht Athgabála*], for only two of the school came to Ireland: Aimirgen Glúngel the poet and Caí the judge. And Caí remained in Ireland until he had spent nine generations, in consequence of the righteousness of his judgements. For it is judgements that he used to deliver, namely judgements of the law of Moses (*bretha rechta Maísi*), and therefore judgements of law (*bretha rechta*)

are very abundant in Irish law (*fénechus*). These were the judgements of law (*bretha rechta*) which served Cormac" (par. 24).

In a recent discussion of this and related passages Ó Corráin points out that a brief notice of Caí's role in Cormac's Glossary proves that in its essentials this tradition goes back at least as far as the eighth century (1987, 288-91). The H.3.17 recension of the 'pseudohistorical' prologue provides the fullest account (*CIH* 1653.16-1654.9), elaborating on how Caí went on an expedition from Thrace, joined the sons of Míl and came with them to Ireland. It is to be noted that Caí and Aimirgin, his pupil according to H.3.17, present us with a by now familiar pairing of judge or *brithem* and poet or *fili*. Indeed, this aetiology is particularly ambitious in projecting a contemporary hallmark of these two professions, namely an Isidorean amalgam of classical and biblical knowledge (ch. 1. 10-11), right back to the Milesians themselves.

8. In editing the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* Herrmann Wasserschleben brought great erudition to bear upon identifying the sources used by the early medieval Irish canon lawyers, and concluded: "it stands out among all contemporary and older systematic collections for the wealth of its patristic and ecclesiastical historical material, and attains particular importance on account of countless excerpts from Irish synodal decisions and statutes, which grant an insight into the peculiar views and tendencies of the national Church there and of the national law" (*Can. Hib.*, xiii). Moreover, "an extraordinarily large number of citations are taken from Holy Writ, about 500, but in this connection it seems striking at first sight that almost ⅔ of these belong to the Old Testament. On closer inspection, however, this seems explicable: for a whole series of situations and questions requiring treatment and consideration the Old Testament material presented an embarrassment of riches, whereas for many of the same the New Testament had scarcely anything to offer" (ibid., xiv).

Owing to the rather different preoccupations of the scholars concerned, the contribution of such sources to early Irish vernacular law has only recently begun to be investigated seriously. However, the profound intermingling of secular and canon law along with their practitioners in the monastic schools is beginning to emerge clearly from seminal studies by Ó Corráin and Breatnach already referred to (see bibliography and ch. 1, 10-11). It can now be confidently stated that all early Irish law betrays the Old Testament stamp so typical of the early medieval Irish learned classes' overall outlook and likewise manifested in other intertwined branches of *senchus* such as genealogy, gnomic tracts and narrative mytho-history.

Various factors presumably conspired to produce the affinities between Irish and Mosaic law so clearly perceived by native *literati*. To begin with, direct borrowing from Scripture is the obvious explanation for many features, including the identification of major monasteries with the levitical cities of refuge (2 above) and emphasis upon the salubrious effects of offering *dechmada ⁊ primiti ⁊ almsana* "tithes, firstfruits and alms" (e.g. Num. 18:26 *decimas . . . primitias*, Luke 11:41 *elemosynam*) according to the so-called 'genuine' prologue to the *Senchus Már* (*CIH* 351.9; Thurneysen, 1927, 176) and *Córus Béscnai* (*CIH* 522.33; Ó Corráin, Breatnach and Breen, 1984, 384).

In Irish law "the normal disposition of a man's estate on his death was by equal division amongst his lawful sons, except chattels, of which daughters received *lann*,

rann and *bregda*, and any property which the father had himself acquired which they shared equally with sons. This inheritance by the sons is nowhere, to my knowledge, expressly stated, but it is everywhere implied . . . if there is no male heir, a daughter or daughters inherit all chattels, and may inherit all other property as well. In this event, the daughter was a *banchomarba*, a female heir, and this privilege of women dates back to early times" (Dillon in Binchy, 1936, 134). "The son of a *banchomarba* did not inherit *finntiu* unless his father, while being husband to his mother, was also the nearest surviving member of her *fine*" (ibid., 151), i.e. after her death the estate reverted to the male patrilateral next of kin, typically her parallel cousin, whose sons would be hers too if she married him. Only when the one or more inheriting siblings that constitute a *gel-fine* die out without further descendants in the male line, a situation known as *díbad* "extinction", is the family property shared out among the more distant degrees of paternal kin represented by the *derb-fine*, *íar-fine* and *ind-fine* (ibid., 134). Furthermore, "his father puts an undutiful son (*mac ingor*) out of inheritance and bestows his inheritance on him who performs his maintenance (*a goire*)" according to *Córus Béscnai* (*CIH* 534.26-7). Good early evidence for the equal division of an estate between surviving sons in Tírechán (McCone, 1984b, 57-8) is corroborated by a clear statement to that effect in the Irish Canons (see below), a somewhat obscurely defined extra portion of property known as the *cumal senorba* apparently being reserved for the head of the inheriting kindred (Dillon, ibid., 141-2).

The Irish Canons had no difficulty in finding scriptural justification for these prescriptions. The duty (*pietas*, cf. OIr. *goire*) of sons towards their parents and its relevance to testamentary provision is stressed at various points with the help of apposite quotations from the Pentateuch and elsewhere (e.g. *Can. Hib.* XXXI, 13-4, XXXII, 1-2). The quotation of Numbers 27:8-11 suffices to establish the basic principle of inheritance: *homo cum mortuus fuerit absque filio, ad filiam eius transibit hereditas eius. Si filiam non habuerit, habebit successores fratres suos; quodsi non habuerit fratres, dabis hereditatem fratribus patris eius; si autem non habuerit fratrem patris, dabitur hereditas his, qui eius proximi sunt* (*Can. Hib.* XXXII, 9) "if a man die without a son, his inheritance shall pass unto his daughter. If he have no daughter, he shall have his brethren as heirs (cf. the *gel-fine*). And if he have no brethren, thou shalt give his inheritance unto his father's brethren (cf. the *derb-fine*). And if he have no father's brother, his inheritance shall be given to those who are next to him (cf. the *íar-fine* and *ind-fine*)". After referring to the Mosaic law's requirement that a father bestow a double portion of his inheritance upon his firstborn son (cf. Deut. 21:17), the Canons represent what is obviously the current Irish custom of the *cumal senorba* as a later modification of this: "in most recent days a father divides equally among all his sons and reserves to himself, as if to one of his sons, a part of the inheritance and whole substance, which he entrusts to his firstborn, and it shall be his inalienably, or shall be divided after the firstborn's death between his heir and his brothers and their successors" (*Can. Hib.* XXXI, 18).

It is, of course, hardly likely that early medieval Irish jurists simply jettisoned their pre-Christian rules in so fundamental an area as inheritance and replaced them with provisions taken over root and branch from Mosaic law. In the type of patrilinear system familiar not only from Old Testament Israel but also from a wide range of Indo-European and other peoples, nothing could be more natural than inheritance in the direct male line by preference before moving steadily outwards

through the various degrees of the father's male collateral kin. This is, indeed, essentially the type of system ascribed by Tacitus to the Celts' Indo-European neighbours, the Germans, in the pagan period: "everyone's heirs and successors are his own children, and there is no will. If there are no children, the next grade in possession (consists of) brothers, paternal uncles, maternal uncles" (*Germania*, par. 20). Here, of course, reversion is to the maternal kin after a certain stage, whereas the Irish system makes no such provision. Furthermore, insistence upon the duty of looking after ageing parents is too much of an anthropological commonplace for biblical borrowing to be the most likely explanation. It therefore seems probable that the broad similarities between the medieval Irish and Old Testament inheritance rules owe more to statistically acceptable coincidence than to extensive borrowing. On the other hand, Goody's remarks about the impact of Islam upon parts of black Africa present obvious parallels with the early Irish situation vis a vis biblical and canon law: "the existence of a legal code which was so closely linked with the word of God (it was as if the only law was canon law) meant that there were strong pressures upon certain societies, or anyhow upon important groups within those societies, to adopt new forms of social action. The influence of these law books – Maliki law from the Maghreb – upon Sudanese societies has been touched upon by various authors and it cannot be doubted that changes of considerable significance have occurred and are continually occurring, in the system of kinship and marriage as well as in the organization of kin groups, in the position of the chief, etc. But what is of central importance here is not so much the diffusion of Islam but the fact that Islam is a religion of the book" (1968, 240-1). So, of course, is Christianity, and a core of coincidental agreement may well have been enhanced by imitation of the Bible, the most likely candidate being the 'Zelophahad' rule about a daughter inheriting in the absence of sons but needing to marry a paternal kinsman in order to transmit this to her own offspring (see 1 above).

Be that as it may, the basic point is that such similarities, regardless of how they had arisen, encouraged early Christian Ireland's monastic jurists in the belief that their native law had particular affinities with the Mosaic code. Once this conviction had taken root, even manifest discrepancies could be explained away historically. Thus, as has been pointed out in 5 and 7 above, the doubtless ancient Irish institution of *éraic* or 'wergild' as the normal penalty for culpable homicide was explained as an unavoidable later substitute for a Christian modification of the Mosaic principle of 'life for life' allegedly observed in Ireland prior to Patrick's coming.

9. Lévi-Strauss has suggested that so-called 'primitive' thought, as opposed to the modern western mode inherited from classical Greece via Rome, typically integrates past and present by means of a relatively static mytho-historical model that is primarily concerned with authorising various values and institutions regarded as essentially immutable thereafter (cf. McCone, 1986c, 13). When actual and irresistible changes threaten to dislocate such a system, reintegration can only be achieved by modifying, recreating or (as in the rather special case of allegory) reinterpreting the past in the light of the new present. As Vansina puts it, "traditions are altered, more or less consciously, to fit in with the cultural values of the time" (1973, 96).

Obviously this is likely to have happened on a large scale in the wake of Ireland's conversion to Christianity, although the details inevitably elude us in the absence of sources predating that process. Indeed, Ó Corráin makes the following apt remarks

about early medieval Ireland's *literati*: "this caste of hereditary or quasi-hereditary scholars quite self-consciously held themselves in the highest esteem and discharged duties of very considerable political and social importance: they were the custodians of the past - the *mos maiorum* (in church as in lay society), the royal pedigree, dynastic (and ecclesiastical) genealogy and *origo gentis*. Their powers, as the arbiters of good custom, as provers of pedigree (and thus of claim to role and property), as panegyrists of the great and, above all, as makers of the past who re-shaped it to accord with the pretensions and ambitions of the contemporary holders of power, were extensive and jealously guarded' (1986, 142).

Medieval Irish literature abounds in episodes testifying to the importance attached to the past as a sanction for present realities and aspirations. Thus the 'first' poetic satire uttered by the *fili* Cairbre in protest against maltreatment by king Bres (Gray, 1982, 35) permanently validated the genre and defined its proper use, while it has been seen (end of 6 above) that the leading role played in its compilation by God's apostle Patrick was made the guarantee of the *Senchus Már*'s inviolability.

It has been argued (ch. 3, 6) that the ecclesiastically inspired development of a chronological and synchronistic framework for *senchus* did not significantly affect these fundamentally mythical functions. It is, of course, true that Irish synthetic history was cast in a superficially dynamic mould by virtue of being adapted to and from the biblically oriented scheme of Christian world history with its successive phases (ch. 3, 7-10), but the counterpoise of historical typology must be borne in mind. This method was applied at almost every conceivable level to represent the Old Testament as a prefiguration of the New and the New Testament as a fulfilment of the Old, thus bridging the major divide between them and integrating the Jewish past with the Christian present and future. In effect, it provided a means of accommodating the relatively static view of the past as a display of permanent truths to the dynamic of progressive revelation and vice versa.

Early Christian Irish jurists are unlikely to have been sure how far their *fénechus*'s extensive affinities with biblical and canon law were due to borrowing, coincidence or virtually endless combinations of the two, but they could presumably have ascribed all or most of these to the Church's impact upon law and society by casting Patrick in the role of a divinely inspired radical reformer, had they so wished. The disagreeable corollary would have been that Christianity had had a major disruptive effect on Irish *mores*, that a great deal of the current social and ideological *status quo* was no more than two or three centuries old, and that native practices and beliefs prior to the *annus mirabilis* of 432/3 A.D. had been seriously out of tune with God's law - in short, that until quite recently the Irish had been beyond the pale of God's providence. Small wonder that such a message did not appeal.

Equally obvious advantages attached to the alternative of claiming that the main elements of Irish law, Old Testament parallels and all, were already in place when Patrick came to Ireland and only required fairly minor adaptation, in collusion with the native learned establishment, to bring them to perfection in the light of Christian revelation. In practice, this enabled the Church to claim ultimate control over and, where necessary, modify a body of laws and institutions geared to the social and political milieu in which it had to operate. After all, in the words of the *Senchus Már* prologue cited in 5 above "the law of nature had covered much that the law of the letter had not reached".

At the more abstract level of theory, this construct made it possible to develop a 'native' historical typology in which Christianity represented the natural or logical fulfilment of pre-existing trends and traits in Irish history and society rather than a rude intrusion from outside. The potentially uncomfortable break between the pre-Christian past and the Christian present could thus be minimised and the integration of both phases into an essentially unitary mytho-historical model facilitated. Such a scheme inevitably implied a gratifyingly large role for divine providence in Ireland's pre-Patrician history, the substantial accommodation of which to that of Old Testament Israel could only increase its efficiency as a typological precursor of the Patrician settlement. Pauline claims that God's will could operate beyond the confines of Israel even before Christ's appearance, medieval doctrine about the divinely inspired Greek and Roman sybils (end of ch. 3, 12) and so on made it possible to endow pre-Christian Ireland with certain righteous kings, judges and prophets, but a more literal approach based on Caí's alleged contact with Moses soon supplemented this. The parallels between Irish and biblical history were eventually even enhanced to the point where the two-stage promulgation of the law by Moses and Christ was echoed by adding a major legal assembly under Cormac to the one presided over by Patrick. Indeed, a combination of mythical interest in the remote past with the needs of historical typology presumably accounts for the well known early Irish juristic practice of seeking and often enough, no doubt, inventing legal precedents in the actions of important figures from their pre-Patrician 'Old Testament' (cf. Binchy, 1952, 33; 1973, 40-44).

The age-old integrity and divine sanction of most of Ireland's social and legal system could be thus be congenially asserted, a major advantage for clerics and their associates being the ease with which convenient innovations could be given the prestige of antiques by being slipped into the pre-Patrician *senchus*. In effect, these monastically oriented men of letters were Ireland's first nativists, eager to assert their own and their patrons' place in a unique cultural continuum going back to the Milesian invasion of Ireland and beyond to still more distant Thracian ancestors' peripheral involvement in epoch-making biblical events. So dazzling is the array of the most international, up to date and authoritative scholarship of the time brought to bear upon whatever native materials were used, and so imposing is the composite edifice so constructed, that it continues to mesmerise modern counterparts, whose own rather less coherent model essentially substitutes Celts and Indo-Europeans for Milesians and Thracians respectively while asserting early Christian Ireland's peculiar affinities with ancient India rather than ancient Israel.

CHAPTER FIVE

Kingship and society

1. The almost obsessive concern of medieval Irish writers with kingship is apparent from even the most cursory glance at their literary output, especially in the field of narrative, and clearly reflects the pivotal role ascribed to monarchy in politics, society and the overall scheme of things. The main aim of this and the next chapter is to identify certain key aspects of this ideological system and then to consider their literary manipulation within the broader context of a Christian society with roots in a pagan past.

As already indicated (ch.1, 5-6), kingship is an area in which many scholars have been particularly prone to stress the conservatism of the medieval Irish outlook, the tenacious adherence to pagan traditions, and the weakness of the Church's impact. Thus according to Byrne in the opening chapter on 'the Irish concept of kingship' of his book *Irish kings and high-kings* "the records offer a detailed picture of a self-absorbed society, at the same time archaic and sophisticated - a backwater undisturbed by the mainstream of the Latin middle ages, to which it paradoxically contributed a refreshing current of intellectual liveliness and religious idealism. The primitive characteristics of Irish society, and in particular the archaic features of Irish kingship, find their nearest European parallels in pre-Christian Scandinavia" (1973, 12).

The very abundance of Irish material relating to kingship, the importance of the institution in the Bible as well as in medieval Christian Europe as a whole, and the existence of germane comparative data from other Indo-European societies make it a uniquely good platform for assessing the interplay of pagan and Christian factors. It seems appropriate to start by looking at possible or probable Celtic and Indo-European antecedents.

2. Extensive comparative evidence clearly shows that the Old Irish words for the king and the basic territorial unit ruled by him, *rí* and *túath* respectively, both go right back through Common Celtic to Indo-European protoforms (**rēḱ-s* and **tewtā*) with similar basic meanings (Binchy, 1970, 3-8; McCone, 1987, 110-1, 115-6, 142-4). As pointed out earlier (ch. 1, 7), precise phonetic and rather less well defined semantic correspondences of this kind do indeed imply some degree of continuity with the prehistoric past, but continuity as such is too vague a notion to be useful

in the absence of further specifics and in any case does not preclude significant intervening change.

Nevertheless, there is no shortage of comparative evidence indicative of an appreciable pagan Celtic and Indo-European input into the early Irish concept of kingship. For instance, the Irish king's major functions as leader in war, presider over his assembled people or elders and judge or lawgiver, although commonplace enough, are at least closely paralleled in other ancient Indo-European societies, notably those of the Hittites, the Spartan Greeks and the Romans (McCone, 1987, 135-6).

At the heart of early Irish kingship theory lay the notion that a kingdom's welfare in both the social and natural spheres was intimately bound up with the sovereign's physical, social and mental condition. Medieval Irish literature abounds in descriptions attributing peace, social stability, good weather, abundance of crops, livestock and so on to the "sovereign's truth" or *fír flatha*. Conversely, other passages record the catastrophic consequences such as strife, bad weather, pestilence and famine liable to result from the *gáu flatha* or "sóvereign's lie". These concepts, which will be further explored and illustrated below, are typical enough manifestations of so-called 'sacral kingship'.

The essence of this ideology and institution, various forms of which are widespread among the peoples of the earth (e.g. Frankfort, 1948, on ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia), is that the monarch has supernatural attributes as mediator between the human and divine worlds. Thus on page 64 of a collection of many scholars' contributions on facets of this topic entitled *The sacral kingship* James formulates the basic idea as follows: "as the intermediary between the human and the natural orders, the supernatural potency embodied in the kingship flows through this appointed channel into the body politic establishing a state of harmony, equilibrium and beneficence in the integration of nature and society. It is on this basis that the institution exercises a sacerdotal function, and for this reason that the throne must always have a virile, healthy and alert occupant, since the king, symbolising the community and its transcendental and temporal aspects, is the unifying and dynamic centre".

It seems probable that a sacral kingship along such lines existed among the pagan Celts and Indo-Europeans. Pagan Gaulish belief in the fecundating effects of good judgements has already been mentioned (ch. 4, 1), and Livy's somewhat rationalized version of what was presumably a native account of the Gaulish conquest of North Italy presents us with an ideal pagan Celtic monarch Ambigatus who was "distinguished by both personal and public virtue and fortune, since in his reign Gaul was so fertile in crops and men that the abundant multitude seemed scarcely able to be ruled" (V, 34, 2). In the broader Indo-European context Odyssey 19, 109-14 provides a clear description of the abundance of crops, flocks and fish expected to characterize a just reign, and Calvert Watkins has compared Old Irish, Indo-Iranian and Greek data pointing to "a feature of Indo-European culture: a simple but powerful ethical notion of the Ruler's Truth . . . which ensures the society's prosperity, abundance of food, and fertility, and protection from plague, calamity, and enemy attack" (1979, 181, cf. Dillon, 1947, 3-8 and 1973, 16-8).

Given that such notions are by no means confined to Indo-European peoples (e.g., Frankfort, 1948, 51 on Egyptian *maat* 'truth', cf. Wagner, 1971), this general hypothesis needs the support of circumstantial correspondences that make it

possible to reconstruct genetically significant details linked to an overall Celtic and Indo-European doctrine of kingship along with its mythical realizations.

3. It is well known that certain women are represented in Irish literature as the wives of a considerable number of kings traditionally belonging to different generations or even periods. The evidence relating to two particularly celebrated exponents of this pattern, Medb of Crúachu and Medb Lethderg, has been assembled by Ó Máille, who cites a statement in *LL* to the effect that Medb Lethderg would not let a king into Tara without his being her spouse (1927, 137). Moreover, Ó Cathasaigh remarks of the similar Eithne Thóeb-fota, who marries Cormac Mac Airt in *Esnada Tige Buchet* but appears as his grandfather Conn's wife at the beginning of *Echtra Airt meic Cuinn*, that "in a traditional oneiromantic text she is explicitly identified with the sovereignty of Tara" (1977, 31), and further points out on the basis of a comparison between *Esnada Tige Buchet* and *Cnucha Cnoc os Cionn Life* that functionally "the Laginian Medb Lethderg ('Red-side') is equivalent to the Laginian Ethne Thóebfota ('Long-side')" (ibid., 77).

In *Baile Chuind*, an arguably early list of Tara's kings cast in the form of obscure prophecies, various monarchs are said to 'drink' the sovereignty (Murphy, 1952, 146-9), and female symbols of sovereignty are not infrequently represented as bestowing a drink upon kings-to-be. For instance, in the prophetic Tara king-list entitled *Baile in Scáil* a supernatural enthroned woman described as *flaith Érenn* "the sovereignty of Ireland" pours a draught of red liquor (*derg-⟨f⟩laith*) from a vat into a cup and her companion then foretells the king to whom it is to be apportioned. In *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* a hag by a well successively offers thirsty princely brothers a drink in return for a kiss but is rebuffed. However, when their half-brother, the future king of Tara Níall Noígíallach, has intercourse with her, she is transformed into a beautiful maiden and likens herself to the 'sovereignty' (*flaithius*). Similarly, in a tale recounted in *Cóir Anmann* 'the fitness of names' Dáire Doimthech's five sons, each named Lugaid, encounter in turn a hideous, filthily clad old woman in a well appointed house containing ale (*linn*), but all except Lugaid Laígde refuse her advances. However, when Lugaid sleeps with her she is transformed into a beautiful maiden and states *missi in flaithius ⁊ gébthar ríge nÉrenn úait* "I am the sovereignty, and the kingship of Ireland will be obtained from you" (Stokes, 1891, 318-21). Moreover, the very name Medb (< **Med^{h}w-ā*) is a feminine derivative of *mid* 'mead' (< **med^{h}u*) and must once have signified something like 'mead-woman' (cf. O'Rahilly, 1943, 15).

As Murphy recognized (1937, 143-4), essentially the same configuration of elements occurs in Aristotle's account of the Greek foundation of Massilia, present-day Marseilles, on the southern coast of Gaul (Rose, 1886, 459 = Zwicker, 1934, 2-3; Latin version Justinus XLIII 3, 8-11 = Zwicker 95). According to this the Greek colonists arrived just as the local Gaulish king's daughter was about to choose a husband by offering him a drink. She duly chose the Greeks' leader, they married and their son's descendants supposedly still live in Massilia. This looks very much like a Massiliote assimilation of a native Gaulish myth to account for Greek sovereignty over a city state bordering on their territory. If so, the notion of a king's daughter transmitting sovereignty to the man of her choice by proffering him a drink prior to marriage and thus establishing a dynastic line is clearly attested among the pagan Gauls as well as the early medieval Irish. The

highly circumstantial correspondences involved point strongly to common Celtic inheritance.

These features conform to a well attested but by no means ubiquitous variety of sacral kingship centring round a so-called *hieros gamos* or "sacred marriage" between the king and a goddess held to embody the territorial sovereignty (cf. Binchy, 1970, 11-2). Rather than the king being viewed simply as a god in his own right, as in pharaonic Egypt, divine power is supposed to flow through him by means of intercourse with a deity, a sexual symbolism apposite to the monarchy's fecundating function that has been discussed in the second part of Frankfort's book (1948) with reference to ancient Mesopotamia. Evidence for a hierogamous sacral kingship in ancient Ireland has been assembled and discussed by de Vries (1961, 235-47), and it is in this light that numerous women associated with kings and kingship in early Irish literature are commonly referred to as 'sovereignty goddesses'.

Just as the Gaulish princess in Aristotle's tale preferred a stranger whom she had never seen before to local suitors, so too are the future spouses of kings often represented in early Irish literature as spurning advances nearer home for love of their hitherto unseen intended. For instance, at the beginning of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* the fair Étaín encountered "at the edge of the well" (l. 3) by king Eochaid Feidlech, who is immediately smitten with her, is so unabashed by his request to sleep with her as to state that this is precisely what she has come for (ll. 48-9). After telling him her name and pedigree, she continues: "I have been here for twenty years since I was born in the *síd*-mound. The men of the *síd*-mound, both kings and nobles, asking for me, but it was not got from me because I have loved you with a child's love since I was able to talk on account of your great reputation and your splendour, and I have not seen you before and I recognised you immediately by your appearance. It is you that I have come for then" (ll. 52-7). Similarly, according to *Cóir Anmann*, "Éogan the Great (eponymous ancestor of the Munster Éoganacht) went to Spain on a visit. The king of Spain at that time was Éber the Great son of Midna. Éogan, then, met with great affection in Spain on that journey. The king, then, had a noble unmarried daughter at that time, Bera daughter of Éber her name. And she had given love in absence (*grád écmaise*) to Éogan before he went into Spain. Éogan, then, took the maiden thereafter and she bore him distinguished offspring, namely a wondrous son Ailill Ólomm and two daughters, Scuithniam and Caimell their names" (par. 38).

A strikingly similar constellation of motifs is found in the first piece of Sanskrit literature read by many learners, namely the *Nalopākhyāna* or Nala episode from the vast epic Mahābhārata (3, 53, 1f.). Stimulated by reports, the handsome, truthful king Nala and king Bhīma's beautiful daughter Damayantī fall in love with each other unseen (*adṛṣṭa-kāma*; 53, 16). Correctly diagnosing his daughter's pining condition, Bhīma decides to summon royal suitors so that she can make her own choice of husband (*svayaṁ-vara*; 54, 9). Nala is obliged to plead four gods' suits before Damayantī, but she recognises him as the object of her love and promises to choose him at the assembly. However, the gods assume Nala's appearance. Confronted by five look-alikes of her beloved amidst the host of suitors, Damayantī induces the gods to reveal themselves by uttering a number of truths (*satya*; 57, 13f.), chooses Nala with their blessing and marries him. Nala's happy reign is characterised by right and due custom (*dharma*; 57, 42) as well as religious offerings, which significantly include the famous sovereignty ritual of *aśva-medha* or 'horse-

sacrifice' (57, 43; see 4 below). His union with Damayantī produces a son Indrasena, a daughter Indrasenā and general prosperity to his "treasure-filled land (*vasu-saṁpūrṇā vasu-dhā*)" (57, 42-3).

Some years later he loses his kingdom and possessions in a dice game, and in derangement abandons his wife. As MacDonell puts it, "many and striking are the similes with which the poet dwells on the grief and wasted form of the princess in her separation from her husband. She is *like the young moon's slender crescent obscured by black clouds in the sky; like the lotus-flower uprooted, all parched and withered by the sun; like the pallid night, when Rāhu has swallowed up the darkened moon*. Nala, meanwhile, transformed into a dwarf, has become charioteer to the king of Oudh. Damayantī at last hears news leading her to suspect her husband's whereabouts. She accordingly holds out hopes of her hand to the king of Oudh, on condition of his driving the distance of 500 miles to Kundina in a single day. Nala, acting as his charioteer, accomplishes the feat, and is rewarded by the king with the secret of the highest skill in dicing. Recognised by his wife in spite of his disguise, he regains his true form. He plays again, and wins back his lost kingdom. Thus after years of adventure, sorrow, and humiliation he is at last reunited with Damayantī, with whom he spends the rest of his days in happiness" (1900, 298).

Among Indo-European literatures the choice of a husband by a king's daughter, usually on the basis of tests or ordeals, is not confined to the allegedly archaic peripheries inhabited by Celts and Hindus (ch. 1, 7). In Greek mythology an obvious figure of this type is Iasus' fleet-footed daughter Atalanta, outrunning and then killing her suitors until defeated by Melanion through slowing down to pick up the three golden apples he had strewn in her path (Apollodorus 3, 9, 2). Penelope's attributes and behaviour in the Odyssey are still more revealing and will be discussed below. Damayantī's acts of truth to winnow the four false Nalas from the true one likewise constitute a test, as does the feat of chariot driving she demands later. In Irish tradition the sexually symbolic charioteering tests confronting a would-be king of Tara according to *De Síl Chonairi Móir* have been described earlier (ch. 3, 4) and will figure again near the end of the present section. The challenge of making love to an at first sight ugly hag has a similar import, and in *Echtra Airt meic Cuinn* the future king of Tara, Art, must go on a dangerous quest and slay fierce supernatural adversaries to win his bride-to-be's hand (cf. Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 27-8).

Indian *svayaṁvara* or 'own choice' is generally held to represent an old type of marriage amongst the *kṣatriya* caste of kings and warriors (e.g. Wezler, 1965, 6-7, n.13), the opening chapters of the Nala episode providing the best evidence for this institution. In firmly patrilinear societies like those of ancient Ireland, Greece or India, not to mention the ancestral Indo-Europeans themselves, it would be strange indeed if the all-important kingship were left literally in the gift of a mere woman. Stranger still, perhaps, that the king's daughter endowed with such a privilege by her people should normally be expected to select a stranger she had never set eyes on before, as implied by the Indian and Irish traditions of *adṛṣṭa-kāma* and *grád écmaise* respectively. On the whole, this hardly looks like a real institution, obsolete or otherwise, in the societies concerned. Given Stig Wikander's demonstration that divine functions and configurations may be transferred to heroes in the Mahābhārata (1947; cf. Dumézil, 1970, 4-5), Nala and Damayantī may be suspected of carrying the impress of an archetypal sovereignty myth, as was argued in the case of Aristotle's similarly euhemerized account on the strength of the manifest

connection of the relevant features with 'sovereignty goddess' types in early Irish literature.

Disguise or concealment and subsequent transformation or revelation are essential ingredients of this myth, being still discernible in probable modern folktale derivatives like the story of Cinderella or that of the frog-prince as recorded by the brothers Grimm (cf. the remarks on their version of 'the golden bird' below). In early Irish literature the 'sovereignty goddess' may be hidden beneath an uninviting exterior to be transformed by association with her destined royal husband, as in *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* and the *Cóir Anmann* story of the Lugaid brothers above. Near the beginning of *De Síl Chonairi Móir* king Eterscél of Tara's mate, the *síd*-frequenting herdswoman Mes Búachalla, is described as large and repulsive of aspect, but a functionally equivalent alternative version in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* makes her a regally born and beautiful seamstress hidden away in a hut with only a skylight by cowherd fosterers until discovered by Eterscél's men, brought to him and raised to her proper status by marriage to the king, whose previous lack of offspring is remedied by the birth of a son, Conaire (par. 5-8). In the tale from *Cóir Anmann*, the woman is confronted with five Lugaids just as Damayantī must choose between five Nalas, but in both cases the true spouse is ultimately disclosed. Due allowance being made for the inversion of sexes and the unfavourable outcome, a still more striking Irish analogue of Damayantī's dilemma is provided by *Tochmarc Étaíne* (III, 15-9), in which king Eochaid digs up the *síd*-mound to which his wife Étaín has been abducted by Midir and is promised satisfaction. When confronted by fifty look-alikes, he is confident of recognising the real Étaín from her skill in serving drink but unwittingly selects a daughter born after their separation.

Irish literature tends to focus upon the beneficial transformation of the woman on contact with her destined spouse, but *Echtra Airt meic Cuind* does depict Conn's distress at the loss of his wife Eithne: "and the death of his wife lay heavily with him and impinged upon him to such an extent that he could not order or govern the kingdom or the sovereignty" (par. 2). While the Nala episode describes the heroine's lovesick condition prior to obtaining her proper husband, greater emphasis is placed upon the adverse effects of subsequent separation upon both partners, namely Damayantī's physical and mental deterioration as well as Nala's decline from magnificent king to menial dwarf. However, these are merely opposite sides of the same coin, and Damayantī's recognition and their reunion restore both to former glory.

The markedly equine connotations of Rhiannon in the the Middle Welsh *Mabinogi*, especially the first branch *Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet* (ed. Thomson, 1957), have been emphasised by Alwyn and Brinley Rees: "originally her name may have meant 'Great Queen', and she is repeatedly associated with horses. Wrongly deemed guilty of destroying her child, she is obliged to sit by the horseblock ready to carry visitors on her back to the court. After disappearing in Llwyd's magic fortress, her punishment is to have the collars of asses, after they have been carrying hay, about her neck. Furthermore, the loss and recovery of her son is linked with the birth of a colt which is later given to him when he shows a remarkable interest in horses and (in the Fourth Branch) his acceptance of a gift of horses is the prelude to his death" (1961, 45). Given the ritual significance of the horse as a symbol of sovereignty in Celtic and some other Indo-European cultures (see 4 below), it seems reasonable to

look for other diagnostics of the goddess or woman of sovereignty in Rhiannon's representation, and indeed these soon become apparent.

To begin with, the unmarried king Pwyll first spies her on horseback when sitting on a mound (*gorssed*) near his court in expectation of a wondrous sight (*rywedawt*, ll. 196-8). After various of his followers have failed to catch her on different occasions, Pwyll himself rides after her and succeeds in getting her to wait for him (ll. 203-74). Her beauty is peerless (ll. 278-80, *bot yn diuwyn ganthaw pryt a welsei eiroet o uorwyn a gwreic y wrth y ffryt hi*) like that of Damayantī above or a manifest Irish sovereignty figure like Étaín waiting for king Eochaid at the well at the beginning of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (e.g. ll. 43-4, *cruth cách co hÉtaín, cáem cách co hÉtaín*). Like Étaín (see above), she has resisted proposals nearer home for love of a king she has never seen before: "the chief errand I had was to try and see you . . . I am Rhiannon daughter of Heueyd Hen, and I am being given to a man against my will. And I have not desired any man, and that for love of you (*ac ny minneis innheu un gwr, a hynny o'th garyat ti*), and I will not desire him even now unless you refuse me. And it is to find out your answer concerning that that I have come" (ll. 282-8).

At a feast set a year thence to unite the pair Pwyll's rash generosity enables his rival Guawl to claim Rhiannon from him, and Rhiannon announces a feast after a further year, ostensibly to wed Guawl but really to secure Pwyll's triumph by means of a ruse. This involves Pwyll's appearance at the celebrations disguised as a beggar (*gwiscaw bratteu trwm ymdanaw a oruc Pwyll, a chymryt lloppaneu mawr am y draet*, ll. 366-7) to request the fill of a magic bag. The impossibility of filling this enables Pwyll to bring Guawl to the bag and tip him in, whereupon Pwyll's men appear and Pwyll casts off his beggar's rags (*a bwrw y bratteu a'r lloppaneu a'r yspeil didestyl y amdanaw a oruc Pwyll*, ll. 378-91). Subsequently Guawl is literally beaten into submission and gives up his claim on Rhiannon, who then marries king Pwyll and eventually bears him a son. Pwyll's beggarly disguise after losing his intended bride for the first time and prior to regaining her and revealing himself is uncannily reminiscent of Odysseus's basic behaviour to be considered below and arguably presents us with a somewhat rationalised Celtic reflex of the king's transformation in such circumstances.

This cumulative dossier of correspondences, some of them quite circumstantial, between Ireland or Wales and India creates a strong presupposition that a shared Indo-European foundation is involved. However, this hypothesis would be greatly strengthened by comparative data from the early literature of a third branch at least, which brings us to king Odysseus and his queen Penelope in Homeric Greek epic.

The Odyssey depicts a situation in which the hero's long delayed return from Troy has led to his being, in effect, declared missing, presumed dead. In consequence nobles from Odysseus' own island kingdom of Ithaca and some nearby territories assemble to feast and await his queen Penelope's selection of a new husband. Penelope's famed procrastination made hers a quite abnormally drawn-out *svayaṁvara*, so to speak, in the course of which the royal household and kingdom were being steadily impoverished by her suitors' notorious greed and misbehaviour, obvious disqualifications from kingship that are consistently condemned both in the Odyssey and in similar early Irish literary contexts (see 4 below). Moreover, Penelope makes the significant claim that her own physical and mental state deteriorated from the very day that her husband left her to sail for Troy: "for the

gods who possess Olympus destroyed my beauty (*aglaiên*) from when he went in hollow ships" (18, 180-1) and "Eurymachus, indeed the immortals destroyed my excellence, form and stature (*aretên eîdós te démas te*) when the Argives embarked for Ilium and my husband went with them. If he should come and look after my life, my fame (*kléos*) would be greater and fairer in that case" (18, 251-5).

The Odyssey thus vividly and consistently portrays the land of Ithaca and its sovereignty, now vested in his wife Penelope, languishing in the absence of their rightful lord Odysseus. Penelope is, of course, explicitly represented as a mortal in the epic (e.g. 5, 217). However, it seems quite reasonable to assume that she is either a euhemerized sovereignty goddess or has attracted the key attributes of such a figure by virtue of her role in the myth exploited by the Odyssey. This function may help to explain certain aspects of her behaviour after Odysseus's clandestine arrival in Ithaca that have struck modern commentators as bizarre or irrational.

G.S. Kirk has argued on the strength of apparent inconsistencies in the plot "that an earlier version, in which the contest was arranged in full collusion between husband and wife, has been extensively but inadequately remodelled by the large-scale composer" (1962, 177). Support is sought in Amphimedon's underworld resumé of events in the final book: "but he with manifold cunning bade his wife set up a bow and grey iron for the suitors" (24, 167-8). This, however, is scarcely inconsistent with the main narrative's version, in which the idea of the test to find a new husband is Penelope's but her disguised confidant Odysseus provides strong encouragement (19, 570-87). At most this might imply a variant in which Odysseus first put the idea into Penelope's head, but it does not follow that he had revealed himself to her beforehand.

Kirk finds support for his contention in three of Penelope's actions and one of Odysseus's in the main narrative. "First the odd episode at 18. 158ff., where she is inspired by Athene to act provocatively towards the suitors and so become 'more honoured than before by her husband and son'. If Odysseus had not yet revealed himself, his natural reaction to this performance would be one of resentful suspicion; instead we are told that he 'rejoiced because she was eliciting gifts from them and charming their heart with soothing words, *but her mind was eager for other things, noos de hoi alla menoina*. Secondly, Odysseus's insistence in the next book that if his feet are to be washed by a servant it must be by an aged retainer. This almost inevitably means Eurycleia, who will certainly recognise his scar. That is what in fact happens – yet it is not what Odysseus is depicted as wishing to happen, for he turns his face into the shadow and fears Eurycleia may recognise him. Why then did he so carefully specify an old retainer? Probably, after all, for the precise purpose of being recognized and so declaring himself to Penelope during their nocturnal conversation. Thirdly, Penelope's announcement of the trial of the bow at the end of that conversation. This is utterly illogical. Evidence has been accumulating all that day that Odysseus is near at hand. She may not believe Telemachus, Theoclymenus, or the disguised Odysseus, but she has just related to the last of these a dream which clearly portends the very same thing – that her husband is near and will destroy the suitors. Admittedly she thinks this dream may be false, but it would be welcome to her and Telemachus if it were not. She envisages the possibility, then, that it is not false; so why does she proceed in the very next line, apparently without special reason, to announce a contest which will result in her immediate acceptance by one of the suitors? . . . Lastly, when the suitors have

failed to string the bow, Penelope herself insists at surprising length that it should be given to Odysseus to try – a poorly motivated insistence if she really thought him a beggar" (ibid. 176-7).

As regards the second point above, Odysseus's manifest antipathy towards the haughty young female slaves who pander to the suitors (344-5 etc.) provides an adequate motive for his request for a sensible old woman to wash his feet, and one might reasonably expect a number of such people to be available in the palace. Eurycleia's selection is indeed inevitable in terms of the plot and leads to a memorable scene, but there is no need to posit an earlier version in which this was deliberately engineered by the hero. As to the final difficulty, Odysseus has already misled Penelope into believing him to be, despite his present unfortunate condition, a Cretan of high royal birth, son of Deucalion and grandson of Minos (19, 172-81), a pedigree that would give him every right to sue for her hand. That leaves the first and third arguments, which bring us back to the posited sovereignty myth of Indo-European origins.

On arrival in Ithaca after his long absence and wanderings Odysseus at first fails to recognise his home through the intervention of Athene (13, 188-235), who then reveals all (236-360), helps him to stow his treasures (361-91) and in order to give him the advantage of surprise over his numerous enemies makes him in turn unrecognisable to his own people by magically changing him into a decrepit and ill clad beggar who will initially consort with the lowly swineherd Eumaeus (392-438). After being briefly restored by Athene to his true regal appearance so that his son Telemachus, who has just returned from Sparta and Pylos, may recognise him (16, 154-320), Odysseus resumes his base beggarly mien (452-9).

The following morning Telemachus sets off to visit his mother in the palace and bids the swineherd follow later with Odysseus. Having been encouraged by Telemachus's tidings and the Argive seer Theoclymenus's prophecy that Odysseus is already in his native land and will bring woe to the suitors (17, 84-165), Penelope seeks tidings of the stranger who has by now arrived unrecognised in his own home (492-540). The "odd episode at 18. 158 ff." follows immediately upon Odysseus's victory in single combat over another beggar. Suddenly minded by Athene to appear before the suitors, Penelope experiences a magical restoration of the beauty impaired by her husband's departure twenty years ago (180-1): "then the noble goddess (Athene) gave her immortal gifts so that the Achaeans might behold her. First she purified her fair countenance with immortal beauty such as garlanded Aphrodite is anointed with whenever she goes to the lovely dance of the Graces; and she made her taller and fuller to behold and made her whiter than sawn ivory" (190-6). When Penelope appears before them, the suitors are duly filled with longing for her beauty (212-3), Eurymachus admiring her "since you surpass (other) women in form and stature and balanced mind within (*eîdós te mégethós te idè phrénas éndon eísas*)" (248-9). She then hints at her readiness to remarry and, to the still disguised Odysseus's delight, shames the suitors into giving her fine gifts (250-303).

It is hardly a coincidence that Odysseus's first interview with Penelope begins by applying to her the famous simile of the fecundity of a righteous king's rule (2 above): "indeed, your glory reaches broad heaven, like that of some noble king who, ruling god-fearingly among many stalwart men, upholds righteous judgements (*eudikías*), and through (his) well-doing (*ex euergesíēs*) the black earth bears wheat and barley, and trees are heavy with fruit, and it breeds unfailing livestock, and the

sea provides fish, and the people fare well (*aretôsi*) by him" (19, 108-14). Finally, the beggar Odysseus's prediction of her husband's imminent return (19, 261-316), Eurycleia's stifled recognition of the hero (349-502) and a dream clearly portending Odysseus's arrival and slaughter of the suitors (536-69) is followed by Penelope's "utterly illogical" decision to marry whoever should be able to string Odysseus's bow and shoot an arrow from it through twelve axes (570-81). This test is as unmistakable a symbol of phallic penetration as the requirement in *De Síl Chonairi Móir* (Gwynn, 1912, 134, 138-9) that a successful aspirant to the Tara kingship drive a chariot through the opening slit between two stones to rub his axle against a third known as Fál or the "stone penis". Like Conaire in the early Irish tale, only Odysseus succeeds in passing the test in question, after which he reveals his true identity to all, slays the suitors and is restored to his wife and kingdom.

Irrational though Penelope's behaviour may seem in terms of normal human motives, it conforms fully to the inner dynamic of the type of sovereignty myth already identified from early Irish and Indian sources. Viewed in this light, the association of the improvement in Penelope's looks and spirits with Odysseus's as yet unappreciated arrival in the palace and victory in a brawl would be quite deliberate, while her decision to set up the test to find her mate would constitute an entirely appropriate or even inevitable response to the accumulating premonitions of Odysseus's return and revenge. On this level Penelope functions as a barometer, so to speak, for Odysseus's progress: her sudden blossoming is a subconscious response to her royal husband's proximity and a prefiguration of his ultimate success, which is encompassed through the challenge she is inspired to impose.

To my wife, Katharine Simms, I owe an explicit reference to a very similarly conditioned empathy in a Grimms' fairytale replete with sovereignty symbolism, 'the golden bird' (*der goldene Vogel*, no. 57 in the 1960 Winkler edition). This tells how the lowly regarded youngest of a king's three sons eventually succeeds on a quest where his two depraved brothers had failed, thus acquiring a golden bird, a golden horse and, by a kiss, a beautiful princess. After almost killing him, the brothers steal and bring these treasures to their father amidst great rejoicing, "but the horse did not eat, the bird did not sing and the maiden sat and wept (*aber das Pferd, das frass nicht, der Vogel, der pfiff nicht, und die Jungfrau, die sass und weinte*)" (ibid., 327). Subsequently the youngest son manages to slip into the palace disguised as a pauper: "no one recognised him, but the bird began to sing, the horse began to eat, and the beautiful maiden stopped weeping. The king asked in astonishment 'what does that mean?'. Then the maiden spoke: 'I don't know why, but I was so sad and now I am so happy. I feel as if my rightful bridegroom had come (*ich weiss es nicht, aber ich war so traurig, und nun bin ich so fröhlich. Es ist mir, als wäre mein rechter Bräutigam gekommen*)'" (ibid., 328). Then she told all, the wicked brothers were executed, "but he (the youngest) was married to the beautiful maiden and designated the king's heir (*er aber ward mit der schönen Jungfrau vermählt und zum Erben des Königs bestimmt*)".

It could, then, be argued that the Odyssean poet, far from failing to rework an assumed prototype altogether neatly, has achieved a highly effective counterpoint in the person of Penelope between a behaviour pattern conditioned by the stylised conventions of a sovereignty myth presumably known to his audience and a psychologically realistic portrayal of the diffidence and pessimism natural after two decades of repeatedly frustrated expectations. If so, these striking ancient Greek and

later German parallels with the Celtic and Indian material considered above provide vital further points of comparison to corroborate the hypothesis of a significant Indo-European core.

4. The integrating function characteristic of a sacral king in relation to society and the world about him has already been referred to (2 above). Furthermore, a rather distinctive tripartite representation of this process seems to typify the cultic practices, institutions and mythical or historical narratives of various Indo-European peoples.

To begin with, there is widespread literary and linguistic evidence for a basic Indo-European institutional dichotomy between the **koryos* or 'Männerbund' and the **tewtā* or 'tribe' (McCone, 1987; cf. 1986d, 16-22). The former was an itinerant werewolf society of typically youthful, aristocratic and as yet propertyless and unmarried warrior-hunters (**hyuhen-es* or **hyuhn̥-ḱōs* "youths", **moryōs* "killers", **wl̥kʷōs* or **lukʷōs* "wolves") who fought on foot with javelin and shield, the latter a propertied and preeminently cattle-owning community of older married soldier-farmer householders (**potey-es*) who may have been divided by birth and wealth into a yeoman infantry (**wihrōs*) and a chariot-borne aristocracy (**h₂ner-es*) culminating in the king (*rēḱ-s*). A third age grade was constituted by the elders (**senōs* and **gerh₂ont-es*), members of the **tewtā* beyond military age who were apparently charged with various advisory, judicial and religious functions (McCone, 1987, 125 and 134).

It is clear from Livy's historicising account of Rome's first four or so-called 'pre-Etruscan' kings that the vigorous Romulus essentially embodies the wildness (*ferocitas*) of the Männerbund's *iuventus*, the elderly and pacific Numa the juridical and religious concerns (*iustitia religioque*) of the *senatus*, and the stern Tullus a more dutiful approach (*fides*) to warfare appropriate to the soldier-farmers of the *populus*. These three successive stages culminate in Ancus, who combines his predecessors' qualities in a reign marked by success and prosperity of the state or *civitas* as a whole in war and peace. This mytho-historical pattern replicates a cultic one. Thus of ancient republican Rome's most prestigious priestly quartet the *flamen Quirinalis* was devoted to a war-god intimately linked with Romulus, the *flamen Martialis* to the soldier-farmers' deity, and the *flamen Dialis* to the wise father of the gods, while the *rex sacrificulus* provided the ritual continuation of the former kings' sovereign integrating role (Livy II, 2, 1; McCone, 1987, 127-35).

In connection with the last of these Dumézil draws attention to "the *regia*, the *regia domus*, on the Forum. In the historic period, the *rex* and the *regina* do not live there: the *regia* is essentially the department of the grand pontiff, who has taken onto himself the most active part of the religious heritage of the king. But it still remains, in name, the "house of the king", and rituals like that of the October Horse, on the Ides of the first month of autumn, make sense only if the *regia*, which holds an important place in them, is understood in this fashion" (1973, 119-20). Franz Schröder long ago (1927) connected this equine sacrifice in Rome with similar fructifying rituals involving horses in Norse, Greek, Indian and Irish sources, and argued for their origins in a sexually symbolic Indo-European sacrifice to secure the fecundity of a king's reign, as is particularly apparent from the Irish, Indian and Germanic evidence (Davidson, 1988, 54-6).

The Irish institution is known only from the somewhat hyperbolical pen of the twelfth-century Giraldus Cambrensis: "there is, then, in the northern and further

part of Ulster, among the Cenél Conaill to be precise, a certain people that is wont to appoint a king for itself by an excessively barbarous and abominable rite. When the whole people has been gathered together, a white horse (*iumentum candidum*) is brought into the midst. Whereupon he who is to be elevated not into a chief (*in principem*) but into a beast, not into a king (*in regem*) but into an outlaw (*in exlegem*), approaching bestially in the presence of all, no less impudently than imprudently declares himself too to be a beast. And when the animal has been killed forthwith and boiled in pieces in water, a bath is prepared for him in the same water. Sitting in this, he himself eats of those meats brought to him, his people standing round and eating with him. He also quaffs and drinks of the broth in which he is washed not from some vessel, not with his hand but just with his mouth all around. When these things have been thus carried out by due rite, not right, his kingship and lordship have been confirmed (*regnum illius et dominium est confirmatum*)" (*Topographia Hibernica* 3, 25). A probable narrative equivalent of this ritual is supplied by the *Cóir Anmann* tale of the five Lugaids, in which Lugaid Laígde's sexual encounter with the woman of sovereignty was preceded by his capture and consumption of a fawn (*láeg*), from which one of his brothers made a feast (*feis*) for them (Stokes, 1891, 318-9). The basic significance of *feis* in such regal contexts as the *Feis Temro* or Feast of Tara has been well brought out by Carney: "*feis* is the verbal noun of *foaid* 'sleeps, spends the night'; hence *feis la mnaí* means 'to sleep with (or, to marry) a woman'" (1955, 334).

The celebration of the *aśvamedha* after Nala's successful wooing of Damayantī has already been mentioned (3 above), and a study by Jaan Puhvel compares this patently sexual Indian sacrifice for the prosperity of king and kingdom, in the course of which the king's first wife places the dead horse's penis in her lap (cf. Schröder, 1927, 311), with the Roman *October equus* and, above all, the Irish inauguration rite (1970). In Dumézil's words, "once returned, the horse is sacrificed according to an extremely detailed ritual which entails a very rich symbolism, the horse being assimilated to the totality of what the king and through him his subjects may expect. Just before the sacrifice the body of the living horse is divided into three sections, front, middle and rear, upon which three of the king's wives (the titular queen, the favourite, and a woman called 'rejected') respectively perform unctions placed under the patronage of the gods Vasus, Rudras and Ādityas and aimed to procure for the king, variously, spiritual energy (*tejas*, in front), physical force (*indriya*, in the middle), cattle (*paśu*, at the rear), these three benefits, divided between the three functions, recapitulating themselves in a fourth term, prosperity or good fortune (*śrī*)" (1966, 226-7).

The oldest attested meaning of the second term of the compound *aśva-medha* is 'broth', which may be significant in relation to the rite described by Giraldus, and Puhvel draws attention to the Gaulish royal name *Epo-meduos* containing the words 'horse' (*epo-* < **ekwo-*, whence also Skt. *aśva-*) and 'mead' (1970, 164 and 167). Insisting that the inversion of sexes affecting the human and animal principals in the Indian and Irish rituals cannot be dismissed as trivial, Puhvel gives reasons for regarding the inaugural context and sexual roles in the Irish record as closest to the presumed common prototype: "the Indo-European pattern of theriomorphic hierogamy was clearly King and Mare, the Near Eastern and Aegean one Queen and Bull (e.g. Europa, Pasiphae in Cretan saga, wife of Archon Basileus in Greek religion, and so on). The Indic *aśvamedha* is thus a halfway house of trans-

formation" (ibid., 168-9). Dumézil (1973, 70-84) further discusses an episode from the Mahābhārata in which the disgraced king Yayāti is restored to celestial integrity by a quartet of variously endowed grandsons fathered upon his daughter Mādhavī, like the Irish Medb a feminine derivative of the Indo-European **medʰu* "mead" (3 above), by a succession of four monarchs. In accordance with Indian ideology these grandsons individually excel in wealth, strength and the paired sovereign attributes of truth and sacrifice, all of which they combine to elevate Yayāti.

There is, of course, no trace of tripartition and integration in Giraldus's account of the Donegal inauguration. However, this feature does occur in the well known account of the Tara king Lugaid Réoderg's conception. This presents an Irish mythical scheme strikingly similar in import to the Indian equine ritual (Dumézil, 1973, 105-6), an early Iranian account of the separation of Yimo's sovereignty (cf. Skt. *Yama* "twin" < **yem-os*) into three parts acquired by a god, a warrior and a landowning dynast respectively (ibid., 40-2), and also to the historicising legend of Rome's first four kings (McCone, 1987, 135-8).

According to the beginning of *Cath Bóinde* "(there was) a king who assumed the kingship of Ireland once, namely Eochaid Feidlech . . . It is on this account that he was called Eochaid Feidlech ("steadfast"), because he was steadfast (*feidil*) with everyone, i.e. that king was honourable towards everyone. He had four sons, namely the three Find-emna ("white triplets"), i.e. *emain* ("twins/triplets" < **yem-nī*) a thing that is not divided, and Conall Anglondach . . . The former were born of the same delivery - Bres, Nár and Lothar their names - and it is they who begat Lugaid of the three red stripes (*Lugaid tri ríab nderg*) upon their own sister the night before giving the battle of Drumcree to their father so that the three of them fell there by Eochaid Feidlech's hand". *Aided Meidbe* gives a somewhat more detailed account in which the incestuous sister is named as Eochaid's daughter Clothru, who is said to have enjoyed the sovereignty of Connacht until murdered and supplanted by her more famous sister Medb. Furthermore, *Cóir Anmann* explains the significant physical consequences of king Lugaid's triple conception: "Lugaid Réo nDerg, i.e. of the red stripes (*sríab nderg*), i.e. (it is) two red stripes that were over him, namely a belt under his throat and a belt over his middle. His head resembled Nár, his chest Bres, (and) from his girdle down (it is) Lothar that he resembled" (par. 105).

Clearly this Irish myth too sees the sovereignty as three in one, so to speak, and tells of the prevention of a potentially catastrophic threefold split through the sexual intervention of a royal daughter, who symbolises the kingship's transmission and reintegration in the person of her triply fathered son Lugaid. In Dumézil's opinion "there is certainly nothing functional in the meanings of the fathers' names" (ibid., 105), but Nár may be translated "magnanimous, righteous" or the like and Bres "fight(er)", while Lothar might reflect a rare glossary word for "assembly" or perhaps be read as Lóthar and equated with the better attested word for "vessel" (OIr. *loathar*, later *lóthar* < IE **lewh₁trom*). If so, Lugaid's head would embody the moral, his torso the martial and his nether regions the productive landowning aspect in a manner strikingly reminiscent of the horse's ritual division in the *aśvamedha*.

In strictly functionalist terms (ch. 3, 3-4), the relationship between myth and social reality seems unlikely to be any more literal in this instance than in that of the

king's daughter's own selection of a spouse to succeed her father (3 above). These incestuous mating habits are presumably determined by her mythical role as the carrier of sovereignty rather than reflecting actual past or present behavioural norms rare indeed beyond the confines of ancient Egypt. Hence the paradox that, on the mythical plane, this socially unacceptable activity may signify the eminently desirable continuation of the sovereignty in the royal father's direct male line, as in the case of king Eterscél's fathering of his successor Conaire upon his own daughter Mes Búachalla in *De Síl Chonairi Móir*. Conversely, in this context a conventional exogamous liaison can only imply the kingship's less welcome passage to an outside group. A case in point is *Esnada Tige Buchet*, which recounts the eventual transfer of the Tara kingship personified by Eithne Thóebfota (3 above) from Laginian dynasts, represented by her decrepit royal father Catháer Már and his selfish sons, to the Síl Cuinn ancestors of the Uí Néill in the person of Cormac Mac Airt, to whom she bears Cairbre Lifechair, Cormac's successor in tradition, and is later married (Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 74-80).

5. The points raised above constitute a substantial dossier of varied evidence, including some remarkably circumstantial correspondences, for an Indo-European institution, ideology and mythology of sacral kingship. This was based on the widely attested notion that the well-being of society and nature flowed from a ritual marriage between a goddess and the new ruler to emerge after appropriate tests. The former might be called **Med^{h}w-ī* or **Med^{h}w-ā* after the draught of mead (**med^{h}u*) involved in the ceremony, which apparently centred upon an equine ritual and associated feast. The success of such unions was held to depend upon maintenance of the king's 'truth' as manifested by his physical perfection, social standing, justice and so on, any serious infringement of which constituted a 'lie' liable to rupture this happy state of affairs (cf. Dumézil, 1973, 44-6).

The beneficial natural, social and moral effects held to accrue from successful liaisons of this type could be given mythical expression as radical improvements in the principals' appearance, status or mental condition. Conversely the dire results of failure could find narrative realization as a separation of the partners accompanied by the physical, social and/or psychological deterioration of one or both.

As argued above, free males in Indo-European society presided over by its king seem to have been divided into three main age grades, each with its appropriate attributes and functions. These comprised a semi-independent warrior-hunter association of unsettled and unmarried youths, a settled community of married soldier-farmers, and a group of retired elders charged with religious and judicial counsel. In view of this it is hardly surprising that regal fortunes should be viewed in terms of the integration, disintegration or reintegration, as the case might be, of three essential ingredients. Needless to say, such tripartite configurations might, with appropriate shifts of emphasis, survive significant reorganization of one or more of their triple constituents, as seems to have happened in ancient India (McCone, 1987, 146).

There is thus a good deal of convincing comparative evidence that certain key elements of the early Irish theory and practice of kingship have come down from Celtic and Indo-European antiquity relatively intact. Nevertheless, important though the implications of this are for comparative Indo-European studies and attempts to assess the contribution of inherited native forms and concepts to early

Christian Ireland's culture, it by no means follows that her monastically oriented men of letters viewed and described the politically and ideologically crucial institution of kingship in consciously pagan terms or refrained from tampering with it as scrupulously as nativist scholarship tends to imply. Their actual attitudes should emerge from an examination of the representation of sovereignty in early medieval Irish sources that is as unclouded as possible by the question of antecedents.

6. Early Irish literature sets great store by the king's personal qualities. For example, a long and detailed list of the social and moral traits appropriate to a good ruler is given by *Tecosca Cormaic* (Meyer, 1909, 12-5). Much the same concern lies at the heart of the still older gnomic tract *Audacht Morainn*, the so-called 'B-version' of which summarily recommends that the king be merciful (*trócar*), righteous (*fíriún*), proper (*cosmail*), conscientious (*cuibsech*), firm (*fosath*), generous (*eslabar*), hospitable (*garte*), of noble mien (*fíal-ainech*), steadfast (*sessach*), beneficent (*lessach*), able (*éitir*), honest (*inric*), well-spoken (*suthnge*), steady (*foruste*), true-judging (*fír-brethach*), and then names the following alliterative pairs inimical to ruler's falsehood (*gáu flathemon*): lordship and worth (*flaith* ⁊ *febas*), fame and victory (*cluith* ⁊ *coscar*), progeny and kindred (*cland* ⁊ *cenél*), peace and life (*síd* ⁊ *sáegul*), prosperity and parturitions (*toceth* ⁊ *toatha*) (Kelly, 1976, 16-7).

Great kings in saga narrative are liable to be described by similar catalogues in which physical and martial attributes loom large alongside social and intellectual or moral factors. Thus according to *Scél na Fír Flatha* "in beauty (*álaind*) did Cormac come into that great assembly, for the like of his form (*delb*) had not come, except for Conaire son of Eterscél or Conchobar son of Cathbad or Óengus son of the Dagdae". After a detailed description of his glorious apparel (*écosc*), the highlights of the king's physical beauty (*cruth*) are prefaced by the remark that he was "handsome, fair, without blemish, without defect (*cruthach cáem cen ainim cen athais*)" (pars. 3-4). The virtues of two of those other regal paragons Conaire and Conchobar are covered by a set menu of virtually identical and partially alliterative triads in the sagas *Aided Chonchobair* (par. 5) and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (par. 102) respectively, citation here being from the latter: *nicon fil locht and isind fir sin eter chruth* ⁊ *deilb* ⁊ *dechelt, eter méit* ⁊ *chórae* ⁊ *chutrummae, e[ter] rosc* ⁊ *folt* ⁊ *gili, eter gaís* ⁊ *álaig* ⁊ *erlabrae, eter arm* ⁊ *erriud* ⁊ *écosc, eter áni* ⁊ *immud* ⁊ *ordan, eter gnáis* ⁊ *gaisciud* ⁊ *cenél* "there is not a fault in that man as regards form and appearance and attire, as regards stature and symmetry and proportion, as regards eye and hair and whiteness, as regards wisdom and manners and eloquence, as regards armour and apparel and equipment, as regards beauty and wealth and worth, as regards habits and heroism and family".

Three terms in this description, namely *delb* "figure, form", *gaís* "wisdom" and *gaisced* "martial prowess, valour", recur as a single triad in *Aided Chrimthainn maic Fidaig*, which states of the king of Connacht, Fíachra mac Echach, *ba láech ar gaisced, ba coicertaid catha* ⁊ *tíre ar gaís, ba rígda ar deilb* "he was a hero in martial prowess, he was an adjuster of battles and territories in wisdom, he was kingly in form" (par. 15). As a compound of *gáe* "spear" and *sciath* "shield", *gaisced* "set of arms" and then by extension "martial prowess, valour" evidently belongs to the sphere of the warrior. Indeed, receipt of *gaisced* was a key element in a young warrior's initiation, as when Conchobar simply gives the precocious Cú Chulainn a spear and shield in response to the latter's request for *gaisced* (*Táin*[1] 616-26; cf.

McCone, 1986d, 16-7; 1987, 112-4). *Gaís* "wisdom" is above all an essential prerequisite for judgement (*mes*), an activity closely connected with the professionally skilled *áes dáno*. Thus the legal tract on status *Uraicecht Becc* glosses *ollam gaíse* "professor of sagacity" as *in saí brethemun* "the master judge" (*CIH* 1618.11). *Delb* "form", on the other hand, was of peculiar importance to kings, as when Cúscraid son of Conchobar is described as *adbar ríg ar deilb* "the makings of a king in form" in *Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó* (par. 14).

It would appear, then, that the ideal king in ancient Ireland was supposed to excel in the three basic areas of military prowess, mental discernment and physical beauty, thus combining the functions of warrior (*láech*) and judge (*brithem*) with his own specifically regal need for a perfect appearance. There is an obvious relationship between physical magnificence and material munificence, a good example being the praise of Conaire's son and heir apparent Lé fri Flaith "for generosity and shape and form and horsemanship (*ar gart ⁊ c[h]ruth ⁊ deilb ⁊ marcachas*)" in section 106 of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*. Moreover, the typical martial hero of early Irish saga, the "hero within the tribe" as Marie Louise Sjoestedt puts it (1949, chap. 6; cf. Nagy, 1984), was at the same time a propertied pillar of an aristocratic society in which "refusal of hospitality (*esáin*) is a very grave offence" (Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 76-7). Accordingly both liberality in peace (*gart* etc.) and prowess in war (*gaisced*) are important facets of an individual's overall social worth expressed by the virtually untranslatable legal term *folud*, which can refer to whole or part of a spectrum covering due property rating, behaviour appropriate to one's position and rights, fulfilment of legal obligations, honesty, religious observance and so on. The legal tract *Críth Gablach* declares the *folud* peculiar to a king to consist of acting for his *túath* in various external legal dealings, giving them a righteous judge, upholding the material support (*folog*) due under certain circumstances, and providing a duly constituted and conducted assembly (*óenach*) for the proper promulgation of a military hosting (*slógad*), or special ordinance (*rechtge*) in the three crucial areas of armed expulsion of foreigners (*rechtge do indarbbu echtarchiniúil*), preparation of crops (*rechtge fri túar toraid*) and "faith that illuminates" (*recht crettme ad:annai*) (pars. 36-9). It further decrees forfeiture of a king's proper status and entitlements through such social stigmas as being caught performing menial tasks or going round without his proper retinue as well as through manifest cowardice in battle (par. 40).

Handsome appearance and conduct, martial prowess, social distinction, and wisdom all figure as qualifications for kingship in the gnomic *Tecosca Cormaic* cast in the form of a dialogue between the mythical king of Tara and his son Cairbre Lifechair:"'O grandson of Conn, O Cormac' said Cairbre, 'whence is sovereignty taken over kingdoms and families and kindreds?' 'Not difficult' said Cormac, 'by virtue of shape and breeding and discernment (*cruth ⁊ cenél ⁊ érgnae*), through wisdom and rank and generosity and soundness (*gaís ⁊ ordan ⁊ eslabrae ⁊ indracus*), by virtue of hereditary right and eloquence (*dúthchas ⁊ airlabrae*), by dint of fighting and an army (*imguin ⁊ sochraite*) it is taken'" (par. 5).

Needless to say, the sagas provide ample illustration. The emphasis upon beauty in an aspirant to kingship has already been adequately exemplified. Cormac Mac Airt's well known accession to the Tara monarchy as a result of a true judgement in the tales *Genemuin Chormaic*, *Scéla Eogain ⁊ Chormaic* and *Cath Maige Mucrama* (both ed. O'Daly, 1975) has been aptly discussed by Ó Cathasaigh (1977,

62-5). In *De Síl Chonairi Móir* a supernatural army is assembled by his mother Mes Búachalla to secure the kingship of Tara for Conaire by threat of force in the face of the local population's initial hostility. As already pointed out (ch. 3, 4), this text and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* recount Conaire's progress to the kingship in a structurally similar way despite significant surface differences. In the latter version (pars. 11-4) the future king is foretold in a vision induced by ritual trance at a *tairb-feis* or "bull-feast", and the youthful Conaire duly appears in conformity with this (cf. Lugaid Réoderg in *Serglige Con Culainn*, pars. 23-7). Since, however, he is manifestly under age, the people of Tara refuse to accept him: "'It seems to us that our bull-feast and our incantation of truth have been spoiled, since it is a beardless young lad that has been shown to us in it'. 'That does not matter' said he. A young generous (*eslobar*) king is no blemish. That is not to be judged extinction of patrimony (*ní messi díb[ad] é sin*, l. 163: original reading best preserved in D iv 2 *ní misi dib- esein*, Knott, 1936, 49). I have a paternal and grandpaternal right to bind the hostages of Tara'. 'Wonder of wonders' said the host. They bestow the kingship of Ireland upon him, and he said 'I shall enquire of the wise that I may be wise myself'" (par. 15). In this case Conaire overcomes opposition by a peaceful insistence upon his qualifications of generosity and hereditary right, thus in effect giving a true judgement acknowledged as such by his subjects-to-be. His subsequently declared aim to become wise completes a triple qualification in the major spheres of material, social and intellectual capacity.

Conversely, failure in one or more of these departments can bring a king down. A physical defect, debility or niggardliness can cause loss of sovereignty. For instance, the law tract on bees *Bech-bretha* alludes to the arguably historical deposition of the seventh-century Ulster dynast Congall Cáech ("C. the one-eyed") from the Tara kingship through being blinded in one eye by bees (pars. 31-3; Charles-Edwards and Kelly, 1983, 131). Cormac's Glossary tells how king Caier of Connacht's wife urged her lover, the poet Néide, to request from the generous king a knife that it was a taboo (*geis*) of his to give, satirise him when he refused and thus cause a blemish that would drive him from the kingship. This was duly done, three blisters arose on his cheeks, and the sight of these caused Caier to flee, thus leaving the kingship to Néide (Stokes, 1862, xxxvi-xl). On the other hand, the sagas *Aided Chonchobair* and *Aided Fergusa Maic Léti* (Binchy, 1952) tell how the Ulster kings in question were unanimously granted special dispensations by their devoted subjects from the normal consequences of serious physical disfigurement and continued in office until these defects brought about their deaths, although the deferment of Fergus's end was only possible by keeping all knowledge of his now hideous appearance from him. Ailill Ólomm abdicates the Munster kingship in favour of his son Éogan on account of old age in *Cath Maige Mucrama* (par. 20), and meanness is a prime cause of king Bres's downfall as related in *Cath Maige Tuired* (pars. 36-9). The reign of the lower-class (*aithech*) usurper Cairbre Cinn Chait (C. "Cat-head") after the slaughter of Ireland's noble lineages (*sóer-chlanna*) and their kings was predictably catastrophic (Thurneysen, 1917, 60-9), while a false judgement sets Conaire on the slippery slope in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (pars. 20-1; cf. O'Daly in Dillon, 1968, 114), similarly affects Bres in *Cath Maige Tuired* (pars. 26-30), and forces Mac Con to abdicate in the Cormac tales mentioned in the previous paragraph.

7. The crucial legal term *enech* "face, honour" (Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 84-6) has a basic physical sense still well attested in Old Irish and guaranteed by the Welsh cognate *wyneb* "face", but is inextricably linked with conformity to appropriate social or martial norms and with truthfulness in general. As *Críth Gablach* puts it, a man's honour-price (*lóg n-enech*) remains intact only as long as his *folud* (see 6 above) is unimpaired, i.e. he avoids situations "in which everyone's face collapses (*hi tuitet enech cáich*)", namely the failure to rebut a defamatory satire, bearing of false testimony or evasion of sureties, which are bluntly said to entail *cacc fora enech* "excrement on his face" or dishonour (par. 21). Face, social and moral worth are connected to the extent that justified satire or a false judgement are supposed to have direct physical effects, as in the tale about Caier and Néide above. Indeed, Cormac's Glossary defines *ferb* "blister" as "a bubble (*bolg*) which the man puts on his cheeks after satire or after false judgement" (Stokes, 1862, 19).

The nexus of physical, martial, social and moral or intellectual attributes that constitute a person's *enech* is enhanced in the king's case to *fír flaithemon* or "ruler's truth", which is distinguished by cosmic resonances reaching beyond the individual into the depths of nature, society and morality as a whole (cf. Frankfort, 1948, 3).

8. As is abundantly clear from law tracts such as *Críth Gablach*, *Uraicecht Becc* or *Míadslechta*, the society over whose welfare the king presided in ancient Ireland was meticulously divided into different social classes based upon property or calling, these being liable to more or less elaborate further subdivisions on the basis of wealth, function, professional standing or various combinations of the three.

The backbone of that society consisted of a landowner class of soldier-farmers termed *grád túaithe* ("the grades of the kingdom/lay society") collectively and *fer túaithe* ("man" of the same) individually at the beginning of *Críth Gablach*, the Old Irish law tract that deals with them in greatest detail. In hierarchical arrangement this class fell into two major divisions. The lower of these comprised the various grades of propertied commoner, for which *Críth Gablach* (pars. 3-4) uses the name of the central *bóaire* category as an overall term whereas *Uraicecht Becc* prefers *féni* (*CIH* 1593.6). For the upper division of nobles primarily distinguished by the adherence of clients both use the terms *flaith(i)* or *grád flatha* (e.g. *Críth Gablach* par. 23, *CIH* 1593.6 and 1595.26).

The peaceful land- and householding side of *grád túaithe* activities, commonly termed *trebad*, was the specialization of a professional class of *briugaid* or hospitallers, whose high rank depended on the successful provision of hospitality to any visitors who might request it, and feasts given by such figures are a prominent feature of a number of famous early Irish sagas (McCone, 1984c, 2-7). According to *Tecosca Cormaic* "everyone is a hospitaller until refusal (of hospitality) (par. 31, *brugaid cách co eitech*)", and the opening of *Esnada Tige Buchet* claims of the *briugu* Buchet that "fire had not been extinguished under his cauldron since he took up householding (*ní-ro:díbdad tene foa choriu ó ro:gab trebad*)" before proceeding to king Cathàer's praise: "true, o Buchet, you were a hospitaller for feeding companies (*brugaid bíata dám*), a gift your valour (*gal*), your generosity (*gart*), your prowess (*gaisced*), your smile of welcome (*fáilte*) to everyone in your great drinking hall (*midchúairt*)". Fergus Kelly points out in his recently published *Guide to early Irish law* that under normal circumstances "unlike a king or lord, the *briugu* has no military role" (1988, 36; cf. McCone, 1984c, 19, n.54).

As will emerge in chapter nine, the martial aspect of the functionally composite *grád túaithe* was the specialist preserve of mostly youthful warrior-hunters known as *féindidi* or *fían*-members and explicitly excluded from the ownership of property essential to the status and activities of *briugu* and *fer túaithe*. As *Tecosca Cormaic* puts it, "everyone is a *fían*-member until landowning (*fénnid cách co trebad*)". Because of well documented clerical disapproval of this institution to be discussed later (ch. 9, 8; cf. McCone, 1986d, 3-6) other less socially specific terms for the career warrior such as *láech* "hero", *trén-fer* "strong-man, bodyguard", *cath-míl* "battle champion" are often preferred in the extant pre-Norman literature.

The third and final specialists were, of course, the *áes dáno*, a carefully subdivided class of professional practitioners of numerous different skills that has already been discussed in some detail (ch. 4, 2). It has also been seen that key sections of this were closely connected with the monastic establishment in the early Christian period (ch. 1, 9-12). Naturally, such ecclesiastical elements are generally absent from depictions set in the pre-Patrician past, but biblically inspired historical typology presumably invested these with significance as a prefiguration of the current early Christian system (ch. 9, 13-4).

It is worth noting in passing that these three specialist groups of *briugaid, féindidi* or the like, and *áes dáno* give a remarkably clear focus in early Irish ideology to the three functions central to the Dumézilian system, namely peace plus material and natural abundance ('third'), warfare ('second'), and knowledge centring upon law and religion (bifurcated 'first'; see ch. 1, 2). Since, however, there seems to be no good evidence for a corresponding category among other Indo-European peoples, the medieval Irish hospitaller does not offer a way out of the difficulties and uncertainties associated with Dumézil's notoriously vague 'third function' (cf. McCone, 1987, 146-7). Be that as it may, what matters for present purposes is that the hospitaller, warrior and *áes dáno* classes obviously represent the functional 'primes' of early Irish social theory, and we would do well to analyse relevant Irish material in terms of this actually attested contemporary tripartition rather than the Dumézilian model ascribed rather doubtfully to the ancient Indo-Europeans two or more millenia previously.

In relation to these three constituitive social activities the king's integrating function was real as well as symbolic. Members of the *grád túaithe* were expected to fight in time of war (e.g. *Críth Gablach*, par. 37), but the importance of hospitaller-like *trebad* revolving round farming and the provision of hospitality and feasts appropriate to their and their guests' status is well brought out by *Córus Béscnai*, which begins its definition of the *fled dóendae* or "human feast" by referring to *fled cuirmthige cáich dia flaith* "an alehouse feast from each to his lord" (*CIH* 525.5; cf. Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 81 on *cóe*). The role of the king as leader in war and battle is so commonplace in the sagas and annals that it will suffice here to note the long catalogue at the end of the saga *Cath Almaine* of kings great and small slain in the battle of Allen in 722 A.D. (cf. *AU* entry for that year). The provision of hospitality was likewise an important royal function. For instance, the saga *Cath Maige Tuired* dwells upon king Bres's catastrophic failings in this area (par. 36-9), the proper layout of a king's feasting hall or *tech midchúarda* is described in prose by *Críth Gablach* (par. 46) and through a diagram as well as in verse by *LL* 3637-789, and *Tecosca Cormaic* (par. 4) lists the "proprieties of a king and an alehouse (*ada flatha ⁊ cuirmthige*)".

However, the king also has significant further functions linking him with the *áes dáno*, above all his role as judge and lawgiver, typical instances of which in sagas about Cormac Mac Airt have been given in section 6 above. In the gnomic genre *Tecosca Cormaic* twice recommends that a king give true judgements (*bered fír-bretha*, pars. 1.38 and 6.28), be a poet and one versed in traditional law (*rop fili, rop fénech*, par. 6.12-3), judge everyone according to his substance and dignity (*mestar cách íarna míad, rop midid cáich íarna míad*, par. 6.43 and 45), and that his judgements and decisions be sharp and light (*ropat áithe étrumma a bretha ⁊ a chocerta*, par. 6.49), while *Audacht Morainn* has a litany of precepts pertaining to law as well as various other matters, each beginning with *ad:mestar* "let him judge/estimate" (Kelly, 1976, 10-5).

The law tracts provide corroboration. For instance, *Críth Gablach*, probably a trifle schematically, earmarks Mondays and Saturdays of the king's week for judgement(s) (*lúan do brithemnacht . . . satharn do brethaib*, par. 41), and Fergus Kelly notes that an Old Irish text on court procedure recently edited by him "illustrates the involvement of both judge and king in the judicial process. The judgement is arrived at and expounded by a judge or judges . . ., but it is clear that the king - and the other dignitaries of the back court - also exercise some function in relation to judgement. Thus par. 2 describes the king and other dignitaries as 'the cliff which is behind the courts for promulgation' (*fri breth ⁊ forus*). It would seem, therefore, that the judgement is promulgated by the king or other dignitary, or at least that it is announced in his presence and with his approval, and consequently supported by his power and prestige" (1986, 80). This supreme *cúl-airecht* or 'back court' consists of king, bishop and chief poet representing the three types of judgement underlying Irish law according to *Uraicecht Becc* (*CIH* 1592.3-39), namely a cleric's judgement (*breth ecalsa*), a poet's judgement (*breth filed*) and the comprehensive ruler's judgement (*breth flatha*). Moreover, the mythical authority for this is provided by the commission of kings, bishops and poets allegedly established by Patrick to draw up the main body of early Irish law, the *Senchus Már*, as representatives of the law of the letter (*recht litre*), the law of the prophets (*recht fáithe*) and the law of nature (*recht aicnid*) respectively (ch. 4, 6).

As Marilyn Gerriets has recently demonstrated (1988), there can be no doubt that the king was regarded as the fount of justice in early Ireland. Although a judge in his own right, he would normally take expert advice from professional jurists or *brithemain*, to whom he might also delegate the decision of various cases. This, indeed, is the situation envisaged by the legal text *Gúbretha Caratniad* "the false judgements of Caratniae", *brithem* of the mythical Tara monarch Conn Cét-chathach, in which "every judgement that was submitted to Conn, Conn used to refer it to him, (and) then Conn would ask him 'what judgement have you given?'" (*CIH* 2192.5-6). Caratniae then reels off a string of judgements, each of which appears to contravene basic rules and is declared false by Conn until Caratniae justifies it with regard to the exceptional circumstance involved. Here the king is represented as someone well versed in legal affairs but lacking the detailed expertise of the professional.

This scheme of three functionally distinct basic social categories and an integrating fourth can be expressed mythically in genealogical terms, as was argued at the end of section 4 with regard to Eochaid Feidlech, his three sons Bres, Nár and Lothar, and their joint son Lugaid Réoderg. The functions so interrelated are made

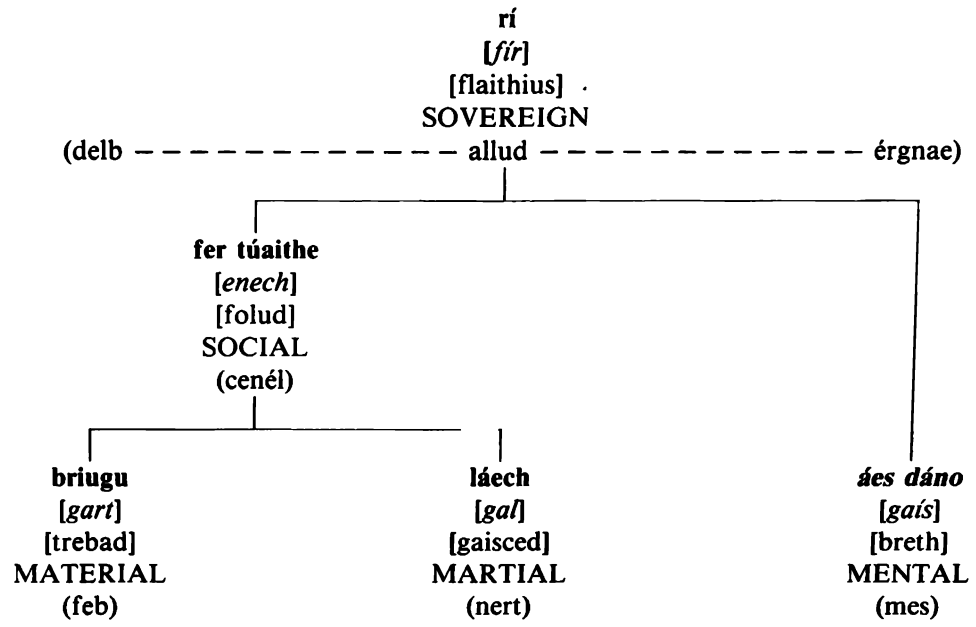
still more explicit in a genealogical narrative from the Book of Leinster about a quartet of brothers famous in saga: "Art Mes Delmonn son of Sétnae Sithbacc had four sons, namely Mes Gegra the king (*rí*) of the Laigin, Mes Réta, i.e. Mac Da Thó . . ., Mess Dána the battle-champion (*cath-míl*), Mes Domnann, i.e. the poet (*fili*)" (Knott, 1936, 72-3). Significantly, it is known from elsewhere that the only brother whose role in life is not specified here, Mes Róeta alias Mac Da Thó, was a *briugu* (McCone, 1984c, 4) to complete the trio of hospitaller, warrior and member of the *áes dáno* related to the king.

9. These considerations point to something like the system represented diagrammatically below, in which three separate specializations in the ideologically crucial areas of material provision, warfare and mental capacity are integrated in two stages. The first two are combined by a landowning class of farmer-soldiers, and then the most exalted of these, the king, further incorporates the *áes dáno* aspect.

Certain key terms and concepts tend to be associated with these spheres in the literature. Owing at least in part to the exigencies of alliteration so prominent in the descriptive passages in 6 above, there is considerable variation in the actual words used, but usually this happens within the confines of a recognizable semantic field and in what follows one appropriate word will do duty for a cluster of others with similar sense or implications.

Activities and qualifications of the *briugu* are covered by terms like *gart* "generosity", *trebad* "property-management" and *feb* "wealth", those of the *láech* or warrior by *gal* "valour", *gaisced* "bearing arms" and *nert* "strength", and those of the *áes dáno* by *gaís* "wisdom", *breth* "judgement", *mes* "discernment" and *éolus* "knowledge". All of the attributes of hospitaller and warrior are required in a somewhat less concentrated form by the landowning citizen or *fer túaithe*, to whom the need for *enech* "face", *folud* "good standing" and *cenél* "breeding" applies with particular force. As the integrating pinnacle of this social and ideological system, the king should not only manifest the whole range of these features but also mirror them in his own person viewed under three main headings of physical appearance (*delb, cruth* etc.), social and martial eminence (*allud, ordan* etc.), and judgement or discernment (*mes, érgnae* etc.). Each term in this trio incarnates the matrix of functions and attributes in the material, martial (capable of being expanded to social) and mental columns respectively, the whole constituting the *fír* or "truth" essential for the successful exercise of the monarch's *flaith[ius]* or "sovereignty". As Alden Watson has recently put it, "sovereignty must create order in all things. This is why the king's truth is seen as so all important in early Irish society. Schematically, the king is viewed as someone whose truth and person must be flawless, for it is by upholding his own honour that he upholds the honour and face of his tribe. The monarch creates order in society by himself being a personification of order. If the king cannot embody these concepts, then disaster can befall the tribe which he rules" (1986, 133).

Thus the main divisions of society integrated by the king follow the same ideological lines as the sovereign's principal personal qualities and the cosmic aspects mediated by sovereignty itself (see 10 below). In this way a triple parallelism on several different levels is established by means of a classificatory scheme to which Lévi-Strauss's generalizations about what is ironically termed 'the savage mind' are eminently applicable insofar as it allows "the natural and social universe to be



grasped as an organized whole" (1972, 135). Rather like the 'totemic operator' posited by the famous French anthropologist in a South American Indian context "the whole set thus constitutes a sort of conceptual apparatus which filters unity through multiplicity, multiplicity through unity, diversity through identity, and identity through diversity" (ibid., 153). A characteristic of such 'pre-scientific' thought is the belief that a particular constellation of features on one level such as the individual may influence and be influenced by similar constellations of comparable features on other levels like human society, nature or the world at large. In such cases the establishment of classificatory parallels between microcosm and macrocosm, nature and society and so forth implies links of causation that modern science would frequently reject (cf. McCone, 1980, 152-5). Hence, for example, the at first sight bizarre notion that a king's physical, social and mental attributes have a direct bearing upon the workings of nature, society and the human disposition in general.

10. It is hardly a coincidence that these should be precisely the three personal aspects identified by Mac Cana as being prone to transformation in literary representations of the goddess or woman of sovereignty: "we have a number of instances falling into three distinct categories, namely those depicting the goddess as (i) an ugly hag transformed into a beautiful lady by the embraces of the hero destined to become king, e.g. the Niall Noígiallach and Lugaid Laígde tales, (ii) a wild wandering female who is restored to sanity and beauty through union with the rightful king, e.g. the tales about Mór Muman and Mis, and (iii) a girl of royal birth brought up among cowherds and elevated again to her due dignity through marriage to the king, e.g. the story of Ethne, the fosterling of Buchet . . ., and that of Mess Buachalla, who was reared among cowherds and eventually became the wife of Eterscélae, king of Tara" (1958, 63-4).

Abstract or non-personal representations of the sovereignty similarly tend to focus upon prosperity or disaster, as the case may be, in the spheres of nature, society and morality. For example, a rather comprehensive list of the benefits of *fír flathemon* or "ruler's truth" in *Audacht Morainn* (par. 12-21) comprises the warding off of great lightnings and plagues, the acquisition of territory and riches, the blessings of peace, tranquillity, happiness, comfort and health, success in war, continuity of inheritance, and abundance of mast, dairy produce, cereals, fish and offspring.

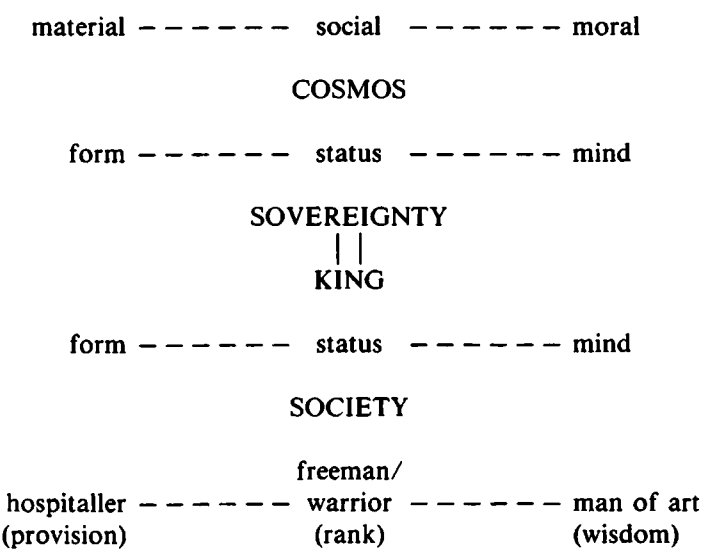
From the milieu of saga *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* offers two fine descriptions along similar lines. "There were great benefits in his reign (*flaith*), namely seven ships putting in every month of May at Inber Colbtha, and mast to the knees every autumn, and great knowledge (*imbas*) on the Bush and the Boyne in the middle of the month of May every year, and an abundance of pleasant intercourse so that no one was against the other in Ireland during his reign (*flaith*) and everyone thought the voice of his fellow in Ireland during his reign (*flaith*) as sweet as the strings of lyres would be. The wind used not to disturb the tail of a cow from the middle of spring to the middle of autumn. His reign (*flaith*) was not thundery and stormy" (par. 17). "His reign (*flaith*) is good", said Fer Rogain." A cloud has not come over the sun since he took up sovereignty (*flaith*) from the beginning of spring to the middle of autumn, and drops of dew have not come from the grass until midday, and wind does not toss the tail of livestock until evening, and no wolf has trespassed in his reign (*flaith*) save for a bull calf from every byre from the end of one year to the next, and there are seven wolves in hostageship against the wall in his house to maintain that ordinance, and there is a back-up surety behind them, namely Mac Locc, and it is he who pleads on their behalf in Conaire's house. It is in his reign (*flaith*) that every man thinks the voice of his fellow as sweet as the strings of lyres would be on account of the excellence of the law and the peace and the pleasant intercourse that are throughout Ireland. It is in his reign (*flaith*) that there are the three top crops on Ireland, namely a crop of corn ears, a crop of blossoms and a crop of mast" (par. 66, cf. *LU* 7009-20).

A similar point is made more laconically at the beginning of *Scél na Fír Flatha*: "an exalted, eminent king once took the sovereignty and supremacy over Ireland, namely Cormac grandson of Conn. The world was full of every goodness in the time of that king. There was fruit of tree and earth and sea (*mes* ⁊ *clas* ⁊ *murthorud*). There was peace and ease and pleasure (*síd* ⁊ *sáime* ⁊ *subae*). There was neither slaughter nor reaving (*guin na díberg*) at that time, but everyone in his own ancestral place (*ina inad dúthaig fodéin*)". Social stability is emphasized in the validation of Conchobar's reign after his probationary year of sole dominion over Ulster in the saga *Mesca Ulad*: "the province was a well of plenty and propriety through Conchobar, so that there was not an empty and deserted former homestead . . . without a son in the place of his father and his grandfather serving his ancestral lord" (ll. 130-5).

The following are typical enough examples of the reverse effects of a king's unsuitability or misbehaviour. During the reign of the usurper Cairbre Cinn Chait and his plebeian followers "the earth did not then yield its fruit to the churls (*aithig*) after the great murder they had inflicted upon the noble lineages (*sóer-chlanna*) of Ireland, and there was a great famine among the men of Ireland so that there was neither grain in the earth nor mast in the wood nor fish in the inlets nor milk with

cows nor weather in its due order" (Thurneysen, 1917, 63, par. 11). After Lugaid Mac Con's false judgement in *Cath Maige Mucrama* "for a year thereafter he was in kingship in Tara, and grass did not come through the earth nor a leaf through trees nor grain into corn. Then the men of Ireland expelled him from his kingship because he was a false king" (par. 66; *an-flaith*, literally 'non-king'). In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* hostile incursions and mayhem signal the beginning of the end for Conaire after his unjust partiality towards his fosterbrothers (cf. O'Daly in Dillon, 1968, 113-5): "they made for Tara past Uisnech Midi and then saw their incursion from East and West and South and North, and they saw the bands and the hosts and the land of the Uí Néill about him was a heaven of fire. 'What is that?' said Conaire. 'Not difficult', said his followers. 'Namely, it is not hard to recognise that it is the law that has broken down when people have set about burning the land'" (par. 25-6, cf. *LU* 6741-6). King Bres reaps a fitting reward for his stinginess in *Cath Maige Tuired*: "neither service nor compensation by the kingdoms (*túatha*) continued, and the wealth of the kingdom (*túath*) was not being rendered through the tribulation of the whole kingdom" (par. 38). Finally, the outraged poet Cairbre ends his famous satire with the words "Bres's wealth is not, then" and it transpires that "that was true, indeed. There was only decay upon him from that time" (par. 39).

It thus emerges that the king (*flaith[em]*) and the woman of sovereignty (*flaith[ius]*) mate and interact as respective representatives of human society and the divine powers manifested in nature or the cosmos as a whole. As individuals each is endowed with a similar threefold set of personal qualities that essentially replicates the basic arrangement of the constituencies they represent. The relevant details pertaining to the king and the society ruled over by him have been given in 9 above, while the foregoing should have demonstrated an analogous connection between the sovereignty herself and the cosmic order she embodies. The broad outlines may be conveniently summarised in diagrammatic form.



The remarks about the diagram in 9 above with reference to Lévi-Strauss's totemic operator apply with even greater force to this scheme, which provides a

classic stratagem enabling "the natural and social universe to be grasped as an organized whole" by means of configurational parallels between various parts repeatedly classified on a "three in one" basis. The upshot is a flexible framework in which social and natural forces can be embodied in an individual, a system of a common type described by Mary Douglas as one in which "the cosmos is turned in, as it were, on man. Its transforming energy is threaded on to the lives of individuals so that nothing happens in the way of storms, sickness, blights or droughts except in virtue of these personal links" (1966, 85). This capacity to personalise or otherwise particularise broader concepts or issues, thus focusing them upon a specific symbol or set of symbols, is crucial to mythical discourse in general since, in Vernant's words, "thought takes shape by expressing itself symbolically in and through myth as it does in and through language" (ch. 3, 4).

11. In this respect the woman's mythical role as the embodiment of sovereignty is crucial as an adaptable device for the narrative treatment of kingship in both general and particular aspects. For example, it has already been seen towards the end of 4 above how *Cath Bóinde* and *Aided Meidbe* express the sovereignty's tripartite nature, threatened disintegration, ultimate reintegration and retention within the family, so to speak, in an account of Lugaid Réo nDerg's conception through a sister's incest with her three brothers in order to thwart their rebellion against a royal father. Conversely it emerged that *Esnada Tige Buchet* uses Eithne's abandonment of her feeble father and greedy brothers for Buchet and Cormac Mac Airt to depict the passage of the Tara monarchy from the Laigin to the Síl Cuinn forebears of the Uí Néill.

As Mac Cana points out, "the underlying tradition envisages the goddess espoused to the rightful king, but it also regards her as the mother of such a king and the ancestress of a royal line" (1957, 88). Thus towards the end of *Esnada Tige Buchet* Eithne bears Cormac a son Cairpre Lifechair to continue the line of Síl Cuinn kings descended from him, while Mes Búachalla's union with the hitherto childless king Eterscél of Tara duly provides the son and heir promised to him, namely Conaire, in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (pars. 6-8). Such literary reflections of a real enough queenly function can endow a woman of this type with considerable significance in the genealogical record cultivated by early Christian Ireland's monastically educated *senchaidi* (ch. 1, 10-11), and her various relations with the traditional founders of one or more lineages can serve to define their respective political fortunes or aspirations.

Two striking examples ably discussed by Ó Corráin (1985, 74-80) and Sproule (1985, 18-21) deserve brief mention here, pending a fuller treatment of the political aspect in chapter ten. A short narrative insertion into a genealogy of the Munster Éoganacht describes a dream by king Conall Corc of Cashel's wife Oíbfind concerning her four sons, from whom a central group of these dynasties claimed descent, and a fifth half-brother Cairbre Cruithnechán, ancestor of their more distant and bitter rivals the Éoganacht Locha Léin: "this is the Oíbfind who saw the vision the first night she had slept with the king in Cashel. That is, she saw that she had begotten four whelps. She bathed the first whelp in wine, namely Nad Froích, she bathed the second in ale, namely Mac Cas, she bathed the third in new milk, namely Mac Bróc, she bathed the fourth in water, namely Mac Iair. The fifth whelp reached her from outside as she lay, and she bathed that one in blood. He is Cairbre

Cruithnechán and he turned on her and ate her breasts from her bosom etc." (*Corp. Gen.*, 196 = 148a33-9). Obviously this politically biased tale seeks to exclude the Éoganacht Locha Léin from a claim upon the provincial kingship by portraying their ancestor as a vicious intruder consequently devoid of legitimacy.

In the genealogically oriented saga *Echtra Mac nEchach Muigmedóin* (3 above), by contrast, the woman of sovereignty is cast as actual or would-be lover rather than as mother or stepmother of the principals, and it is the illegitimate Níall Noígiallach who sleeps with her, thereby securing the Tara kingship for himself and his Uí Néill descendants to the almost complete exclusion of his royal father's legitimate sons. Eponymous ancestors of the Uí Ailella, Uí Fiachrach and Uí Briúin, their rejection of her effectively restricts their and their descendants' dynastic pretensions to Connacht.

It has already been seen (10 above) that changes in the physical, social or mental condition of the woman on contact with her destined royal mate serve to personalise for narrative purposes the natural, social and spiritual benefits thought to accrue to a kingdom under a *fír-flaith* or "true king" in the sense already defined (see 6-7). Conversely, she can also function in a number of ways as a narrative index of failure or unsuitability on the part of a king or would-be king.

Bruiden Da Choca is the story of the rather contentious election of the exile Cormac Conn Loinges to succeed his father Conchobar as king of Ulster and of his death at Da Choca's hostel on a journey from Connacht to Ulster that is beset by tokens and prophecies of doom. The prize of sovereignty over the Ulaid thus tantalisingly eludes him when almost within his grasp, a fate poignantly portrayed by his brief encounter with a fair and shapely maiden (*ingen chóem chruthach*) who approaches and gives the following reply to his question as to whether she will stay and accompany him: "no, and I would prefer it that you should not go, for the cutting short of your life has come. Malevolent is the man who reached you this morning, Craiptine the harper, when he played his hole-headed lute to you. The reason he came was to violate your taboo (*geis*), so that it may be a short life for you in order that we may never meet again. I am gone now, since we shall not meet henceforth" (pars. 19-21). Thereupon she leaves him.

12. Máire Bhreathnach (1982) has argued with particular reference to *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* and *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca* that the goddess of sovereignty may revert to a malign or hideous aspect in order to portend or encompass the death of a king who has done wrong. In the former tale this feature is chiefly exemplified by the hideous hag Cailb, who foretells Conaire's slaughter while seeking admission to his company in Da Derga's hostel after sunset in breach of one of his taboos or *geisi* (pars. 61-3). One of the many aliases she intones on one leg is Badb, probably a pagan war goddess in origin (e.g. de Vries, 1961, 137-8) and commonly depicted in the literature as a gruesome haunter of the battlefield and harbinger of carnage. In the generically related *Bruiden Da Choca* the fleeting encounter described above between Cormac and the beautiful woman of sovereignty is preceded by a quite different confrontation with the bloody Badb, who like her *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* counterpart prophesies the king's impending doom on one leg, this time with one eye closed too (pars. 15-8). This juxtaposition seems to vitiate Bhreathnach's equation of the latter type with the sovereignty, and in any case retribution for regal wrongdoing is hardly the motive for Badb's appearance to Cormac, who has yet to assume the kingship promised him.

The patently Christian message of *Aided Muirchertaig* will be discussed below (ch. 6, 4), but the beautiful Sín undoubtedly functions in it as a diabolical sovereignty woman who bewitches the Tara monarch, causes him to abandon his former wife, and leads him to conflict and death. However, far from punishing any previous misdemeanour of the king's, Sín leads a hitherto flawless sovereign astray out of personal malice.

In *Echtra Airt meic Cuind* and *Fingal Rónáin* the fate of the kingship is bound up with tensions that arise when a royal father's new bride comes between him and the son who is his heir apparent. Although the language of the extant version of the former is early Modern Irish, the title appears in all three surviving manuscripts of the roughly eleventh-century saga list B (Mac Cana, 1980, 53), and linguistic modernization need not have significantly affected the basic framework of an old tale. At any rate, *Echtra Airt* combines various narrative stereotypes and supernatural features with some palpable Christian allegory to be discussed below (ch. 6, 8), whereas social and psychological realism pervades much of *Fingal Rónáin* despite linguistic features pointing to an Old or early Middle Irish date of composition.

Echtra Airt begins with a reference to the benefits of Conn Cétchathach's rule in Tara with his beloved wife Eithne Tháebfata at his side, and then tells how Eithne's death so dejected him that he lost the will to govern. One day, while Conn was alone on Howth Head lamenting his wife, the Túatha Dé Danann assembled in the land of promise (*tír tairngiri*) to expel the adulterous Bé-cuma Cneis-gel ("Woman-shape Skin-fair") to Ireland, home of their hated Milesian successors (ch. 3, 8). "She had a lover in Ireland, namely Art son of Conn Cétchathach and it was not known to her that Art was her lover". Her dress, looks and accomplishments as she voyaged to Ireland are lavishly described as perfect "but for one thing, that a woman was not fit for a high-king of Ireland after her banishment for her own misdeed" (par. 5). Meeting Conn at Howth, she declares that she has come from the Land of Promise to seek Art son of Conn, to whom she had given "love in absence" (*grád écmaise*; 3 above), and introduces herself as Delb-cháem ("Form-fair") daughter of Morgan. Announcing that "I see no defects in you for which it would be right to refuse you, unless they are concealed in you", Conn allows her her own choice between himself and his son (par. 6). Having chosen the old king, she secures Art's banishment from Ireland for a year to the chagrin of Conn and his subjects, and "there was neither cereal nor dairy produce (*ith ná blicht*) in Ireland during that period" (par. 8). His druids' revelation that his wife Bécuma's defilement (*corbad*) and lack of faith (*creitem*) are responsible induces Conn to seek a remedy for this scarcity that proves only partial and will be discussed later (pars. 8-14; ch. 6, 8).

After his return to Tara, Art and Bécuma play *fidchell*. Bécuma loses the first game and carries out the feat imposed upon her (pars. 15-17), but unfairly wins the second and sends Art on an exceedingly difficult quest to bring Delb-cháem daughter of Morgan to Ireland from a distant island in the sea, where she is guarded by various obstacles and her grim parents, all of which Art duly overcomes to win her (pars. 17-28). "And he took the maiden with him to Ireland, and the place they landed was at Howth Head. And when they had reached the shore the maiden said 'go to Tara and say to Bécuma daughter of Éogan that she should not tarry in Tara but should go from it forthwith and that it would be a bad portent if she were ordered to leave Tara'. And Art went on to Tara and welcome was given him and

there was no one in Tara whom his progress did not please except for the wanton and grievous Bécuma. Nevertheless, Art ordered that sinful woman to leave Tara. And she arose quickly in dudgeon from the presence of the men of Ireland without conversation or farewell until she reached Howth Head" (pars. 29-30).

Like Sín in the *Aided Muirchertaig*, Bécuma in this tale proves to be a beautiful but morally defective successor to a king's previous wife, with disastrous consequences for the monarch's reign. However, the above synopsis should have shown that *Echtra Airt* has a further central narrative thread in the form of two related ambiguities affecting Bécuma, the significance of which has been well appreciated by Brendan O Hehir (1983, esp. 169-70). The first is her love-hate relationship with the king's son Art, and the second her status as Delbcháem's flawed *alter ego* and ultimately rival, the Hyde to Delbcháem's Jekyll, so to speak. On arrival in Ireland as Art's intended lover she actually identifies herself as Delbcháem before marrying Conn and insisting, as Bécuma again, upon Art's temporary banishment. Similarly, in the second half of the story it is she, Bécuma, who actually forces Art to search for the very Delbcháem who, as Art's spouse, will supplant her in Tara at the end of the tale.

The symbolism here seems fairly clear. The death of his first wife Eithne and Conn's resultant loss of desire to rule function as an indication that it is time for him to relinquish the kingship to his heir (cf. end of 6). A new sovereignty figure duly appears with the potential to be a success as Delbcháem if joined to her destined lover Art, the king's son, but instead perversely opts, as the wicked Bécuma, for the outgoing monarch, who thus obtains a rather unpropitious extension of a hitherto beneficent reign. This unsatisfactory state of affairs can only be remedied by Art's arduous winning of the true Delbcháem in conformity with the dictum in *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* concerning the sovereignty (*in flaithius*) that "it is seldom it is obtained without battles and conflicts" (par. 16). This, of course, stands in marked and deliberate contrast to the casual way in which Bécuma fell into his father's arms, and the basic moral of *Echtra Airt* is that it is folly for an ageing ruler to hang on beyond his allotted span.

Whereas the literary or mythical significance of a king's spouse as an indicator of his rule appears essential to this narrative, in *Fingal Rónáin* this aspect is somewhat marginal in relation to more mundane motives ably brought out by various critics (Greene in Dillon, 1968, 162-3; Charles-Edwards, 1978, 130-41; Ó Cathasaigh, 1985). Nevertheless, the two sagas do share some significant similarities despite *Fingal Rónáin*'s relentless verisimilitude. As O Hehir puts it, "in the almost completely demythologized *Fingal Rónáin*, it is Rónán's nameless replacement wife who brings about his catastrophe" (1983, 168).

Thus we are told that king Rónán mac Áeda of Leinster remained single for a long time after the death of his wife Eithne, who had borne him his wonderful son Máel Fothartaig, popular with his own and adored by the opposite sex of the province. Eventually Rónán decided to marry the young daughter of the northern king Echaid despite his son's warning that an older, steadier woman would be more suitable. The marriage duly took place, but the attentions of his father's new wife forced Máel Fothartaig into virtual exile, from which he was soon recalled at the behest of the Leinstermen. Original matrimonial intentions were made abundantly clear during a visit to his stepmother's father on the way home: "it is bad for you that you did not sleep with our daughter. It is to you we gave her and not to that old man"

(ll. 66-7). Here too, then, it can be argued that an undue prolongation of his reign is implicit in the aged Rónán's decision to take a wife otherwise destined for a son whose obvious qualifications for kingship are repeatedly dwelt upon. This time the catastrophic consequences are dynastic, encompassing the tragic deaths of all the principal characters - Máel Fothartaig, his friends and assassin, the woman's parents and brother, and finally Rónán himself - rather than crop failure.

It thus appears that the woman of sovereignty can indeed serve as a harbinger of royal death but typically does this in her young and beautiful guise as the heir's intended rather than by reversion to a hag in her capacity as the old king's original spouse.

It remains to note that the loss of kingship brought about by such a woman's behaviour is not invariably final. For instance, according to an early tale conventionally called 'Cormac's dream', after Cormac mac Airt had become king of Tara and Eochu Gunnat king of Ulster, "one night as Cormac slept he saw a vision and a dream, namely Eochu Gunnat having come to Tara and the lifting of the hostages' pillar out of Tara by him and its carriage to Crúachu and setting up by him in Ráth Crúachan. Moreover, he sees his own wife, namely Eithne Thóebfata, sleeping with Eochu Gunnat and fornicating with him repeatedly and coming (back) to him (Cormac) after that . . . He saw the province of Connacht come to Tara and set the hostages' pillar in its own place in Tara. Furthermore, he sees their heads being cut off the women of Ulster by the Connachtmen and Lugaid son of Lugna striking the head off the wife of Eochu Gunnat, namely Cacht daughter of Fergus (par. 5). The king arose terrified, and his druids and sages are brought to him and he relates the dream to them, namely Melchend the druid and Óengus mac Bolcadáin and Ailbe mac Delind and Fíthal, the latter being Cormac's poet and judge (*fili ⁊ brethem Cormaic éisside*). That group then had recourse to their knowledge (*fius*) and told him the interpretation of the dream (par. 6). 'The hostages' pillar being put out of its place', they said, 'what it signifies is your being put out of the kingship of Tara, for it is you who are the hostages' pillar there, and you shall be put among the Connachtmen and you shall be king over Crúachu as long as Eochu be in the kingship of Tara . . . Moreover, your wife sleeping with him, what it signifies is that your kingship (*ríge*) will sleep with him and he will be but one year in the sovereignty (*flaithius*) of Tara. Moreover, the striking of her head from the wife of Eochu Gunnat, what it signifies is that the Ulstermen together with their king will fall at your and the Connachtmen's hand on the day of battle, and it is Lugaid son of Lugna of the Connachtmen who will behead the king himself. For it is the Connachtmen who will take that battle along with you and it is they that will place you again in your kingship. And that', they said, 'is the interpretation of the dream' . . . Three kings of Ireland unite with Eochu Gunnat to depose Cormac . . . (par. 7)" (ed. Carney, 1940, 192-3).

The precise and detailed correspondences between the dream's imagery, its interpretation and what actually happened have a distinctly biblical ring (cf. O Hehir, 1983, 174), being reminiscent of Joseph's interpretation of the dreams of the butler, the baker and Pharaoh himself (Gen. 41-2), for example. Such allegorical application of mantic technique is, of course, by no means confined to the Bible (e.g. Iliad 2, 308-32) and provides, as it were, a commentary on the intended values of the symbols employed. A non-oneiromantic situation analagous to that in 'Cormac's Dream' is presented more allusively near the end of *Esnada Tige Buchet*, which tells

how Cormac seized Eithne by force, lost her to the Leinstermen and then recovered her permanently with proper marital arrangements (see Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 75-6).

13. A further factor liable to figure in the literature as a portent of death is the breach of *geisi* or "taboos". As A. and B. Rees put it, "the violation of *gessa* is such a sure omen of approaching death that it might almost be inferred that a hero is safe from harm while his *gessa* remain inviolate. Then, as his time approaches its end, he finds himself in situations where he cannot avoid breaking them" (1961, 327). Although such taboos are by no means confined to kings in medieval Irish material, their significance and accumulation do tend to be greatest in the case of major monarchs by virtue of Sjoestedt's principle that "the more important a person is and the more sacred he is, the more *geasa* he has. The king's person is thus hedged around with prohibitions" (1949, 71). Although there does not seem to be any compelling evidence for an Indo-European institution of regal taboos, this apparently widespread concomitant of priesthoods and sacral kingships around the globe (cf. Frazer, 1922, 168-75) could have attached itself easily enough to the hierogamous monarchs of the pagan Celts or the pre-Christian Irish.

Whereas royal *geisi* in saga generally pertain to the individual destined to be king rather than to the office itself, an extant Middle Irish text edited by Dillon (1951) lists and describes the seven prohibitions (*urgarta*) and seven prerogatives (*búada*) of the king of Tara followed by the twin sets of five applying to each of the four provincial kings. It is difficult to gauge the relationship between such a synthetic historical scheme and current socio-political observances. However, the past tenses predominating in the prose seem to betoken a deliberately antiquarian orientation, and David Greene may well be right to caution in this connection that "in the case of sacral kingship . . . there was an enormous gap between the concept as preserved and elaborated by the literary men, on the one hand, and the realities of political structures in Early Christian Ireland" (1979, 19). As Kelly points out, although *Tecosca Cormaic* begins its list of a king's proper attributes by recommending *rop sogeis* "let him be of good (i.e. keep) taboos" (par. 6), "*geisi* are not mentioned in the surviving law-texts" (1988, 20). The fact remains, however, that even unreal or ostensibly outmoded features may provide a means of articulating very real contemporary concerns, as suggested by Philip O'Leary in a recent study (1988) arguing that in medieval Irish literature *geisi* are first and foremost a narrative index of such important considerations as honour and social standing. Moreover, whatever their pagan origins, taboos are not inherently inimical to Christian teaching. After all, in accordance with an angel of God's injunction the cutting of his hair was taboo for that great biblical leader of Israel Samson and duly caused his ruin at the hands of Delilah and the Philistines (Jud. 13-7).

In *Bruiden Da Choca* the offering of the kingship of Ulster to Cormac and his acceptance are followed by a list of the "determinations of his life (*ércholti a sáeguil*)" or "taboos (*gesa*)" enjoined upon him at his birth by the druid Cathbad (par. 6). These are broken one after the other in the doom-laden narrative leading up to Cormac's premature death, which they thus portend. Like the woman of sovereignty mentioned in 11 above, maintenance of his *geisi* eludes him as he is on the verge of becoming king.

In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* there is a still more obvious link between the maintenance of such taboos and the fortunes of the sovereignty itself. Upon being made king

of Tara, Conaire promulgates the prohibitions revealed to him by the supernatural father (par. 16) who had shown him how to qualify as king (par. 13). After unjust failure to enforce one of these, "let not plundering (*díberg*) be taken in your reign", against his beloved fosterbrothers (pars. 18-21), Conaire breaks his remaining taboos at an accelerating rate as a prelude to death, remarking at one climactic moment *ro-m:gabsat-sa mo gessi uili innocht* "all my taboos have caught me tonight" (par. 36 = *LU* 6814). As manifestations of the ruler's contract with the divine or supernatural order, the state of his *geisi* is here symptomatic of the health of his kingship and thus performs a narrative function analogous to that of the woman of sovereignty's condition and conduct in some other tales.

14. The preceding sections have sought to highlight the close correlation between narrative and more abstract accounts of the proper or improper attributes of sovereignty, the corollary being that myth and story accurately reflect contemporaneous ideology in this crucial area. However, the next chapter must address the question of how far this ideology and its mythological or narrative reflections were in tune with the Christian tenor of the Patrician settlement held to govern early medieval Irish law and society as a whole (ch. 3, 9; ch. 4, 3-9).

CHAPTER SIX

Sovereignty and the Church

1. In view of the comparative evidence adduced in the previous chapter for the quite extensive pre-Christian roots of many basic ingredients concerned, one might be forgiven for thinking that a fundamentally pagan ethos of sacral kingship had survived the establishment of Christianity in Ireland with little or no significant change. This, for instance, appears to be Mac Cana's view: "the Church's organization adapted itself to the native social structure and evolved with it until the great ecclesiastical reform of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This native order was based upon the small tribal kingdom, or conglomeration of such kingdoms, each with its sacred king who was the focus and pivot of socio-political organization. By him stood his druid in pre-Christian times, later his learned poet ('fili') and judge, who were later joined by abbot or bishop. Because of its central role in traditional society the kingship generated a vast proliferation of myth, hero-tale and legend, which continued to be added to within the Christian and literate period . . . When the ritual of the 'hierogamos', the sacred marriage to the goddess which solemnized the inauguration of the sacral king, was trimmed of its more blatantly sexual elements, probably in the sixth century, its accompanying mythology continued unabated, because of the very centrality of the institution of kingship . . . Like all myths it had its stereotypes (was in itself, one might say, a stereotype), but never lost its social reference and function until the society itself was finally destroyed. Nothing demonstrates more clearly the continuity of mythological concepts in Irish thought and literature under Christianity" (1986, 43).

However, Mac Cana's own rather surprising strictures about "Irish scholars, who because of their strongly positivist philological formation, have disregarded the likely effects of a sweeping religious (and intellectual) change on the traditional corpus of mythico-religious texts" (ibid., 37) prompt the question whether the Christian and monastic moulders of this material really could have accepted at face value a sacrality vested in a goddess or goddesses, when the very acknowledgement of such status flagrantly contravened the First Commandment of their monotheistic creed: "thou shalt have none other gods in my sight" (Deut. 5:7 *non habebis deos alienos in conspectu meo*). If, however, they did have scruples about this fundamental matter, why did they exploit and even delight in these often unashamedly erotic symbols? Did they, perhaps, apply an allegorical or typological *interpretatio Christiana* (ch. 3, 12)?

2. To begin with, there can be no doubt that central tenets of this regnal ideology were fully attuned to clerical attitudes from at least the seventh century on. Thus the early eighth-century Irish Canons, here citing the seventh-century text *De XII Abusivis Saeculi* (Anton, 1982, 583-4), declare that "the iniquity of an unjust king disrupts peoples' peace, raises obstacles to kingship, removes lands' fruits, hinders the people's services, leads to dear ones' deaths, stirs up enemies' incursions into territories, works beasts up everywhere with the savaging of stock, gives rise to atmospheric storms, impedes the fecundity of lands and the bounties of the sea, kindles lightnings, burns up the blossoms of trees, casts down unripe fruits, not only darkens the countenance of the present rule but also obscures sons and grandsons so that they should not inherit the kingship" (*Can. Hib.* XXV, 3).

According to the same source "the justice, however, of a just king (*justitia vero regis justi*) is the following: to judge no one unjustly, to be a defender of strangers, widows and orphans, to check thefts, to punish adulteries, not to nurture the unchaste and actors, not to exalt the wicked, to destroy the wicked from the earth, not to allow parricides and murderers to live, to defend churches, to succour the poor with alms, to set just men over the kingdom's affairs, to have wise and sober old men as counsellors, not to heed the superstitions of druids (*magorum*), sorceresses and augurs, to defend the country bravely and justly against adversaries, to trust in God throughout, not to become haughty from successes, to bear all adversities patiently, to hold the catholic faith in God, not to allow his sons to act wickedly, to attend to prayers at regular times, not to take food before a suitable hour. The king's justice is peoples' peace, a country's protection, subjects' inviolability, a nation's defence, cure of diseases, men's happiness, clemency of weather, calmness of sea, fecundity of land, solace of the poor, sons' inheritance, hope of future felicity, abundance of crops, fertility of trees (*justitia regis pax populorum est, tutamen patriae, immunitas plebis, munimentum gentis, cura languorum, gaudium hominum, temperies aeris, serenitas maris, terrae fecunditas, solatium pauperum, hereditas filiorum, spes futurae beatitudinis, segetum abundantia, arborum fecunditas*)" (ibid., XXV, 4).

The basic dichotomy here is entirely in keeping with Proverbs 29:4 "the just king raiseth up the land; the greedy man shall cast it down (*rex iustus erigit terram vir avarus destruet eam*)". Furthermore, "a king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes" (Prov. 20:8, *rex qui sedet in solio iudicii dissipat omne malum intuitu suo*).

Narrative reflexes of these and similar principles are in good supply, but a few germane examples must suffice here. Regal injustice's hindrance of people's services is illustrated when "neither service (*fognam*) nor recompense by the kingdoms remained" as a result of Bres's meanness in *Cath Maige Tuired* (par. 38), probably a deliberate echo of Judges 9:38 "who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?" (see 11 below). The enfeebled Cathàer's failure to check his greedy sons' depredations on Buchet in *Esnada Tige Buchet* contravenes the injunction not to allow one's sons to act wickedly and causes loss of the Tara sovereignty rather as the venality of the aged Samuel's sons signals the end of their line of judges and a new line of kings (1 Sam./Kgs. 8). In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* the people of Tara's initial reluctance to accept the youthful Conaire as king (par. 15) is eminently compatible with the Irish Canons' citation of Ecclesiastes 10:16: *vae tibi terra cuius rex est puer* "woe to thee, o land, whose king is a boy" (*Can. Hib.* XXV, 5). Conaire soon shows

himself ready to have wise and sober old men as counsellors by announcing "I will enquire of the wise that I may be wise myself" (par. 15, *im:cáemros-sa do gáethaib corbom gáeth fo-deisin*), but then fails to check theft in his reign by his foster-brothers (pars. 18-9). Almost ineluctably his partiality for the latter leads him into a false judgement allowing them and their fellow murderous miscreants to live (pars. 20-21), with disastrous consequences for king and kingdom. Solomon, it seems, was right.

Moreover, the imbuing of the king's justice with obviously Christian elements and ecclesiastical concerns is also found in so-called "secular" wisdom texts in the vernacular. These typically blend a smattering of such specifics with many more neutral precepts that are, nevertheless, by and large perfectly compatible with the teachings of Church and Bible. Recognition of this feature led Thurneysen to moot the following possibilities about the author of what he regarded as the earliest recension (A) of the *Audacht Moraind* edited by him: "the author might well be a *fili* who was a *brithem* at the same time; he recommends the king to base his decisions on judgements reached earlier (19); naturally, only the professional *brithem* can provide him with these. On the other hand, he is quite unwarlike (32); his ideal is peace and comfortable quiet (13), and there is no word about the king's duties of looking after his army and being ready for battle, even though he is promised victory as a reward for his righteousness (52, cf. 11). Thus only one side of the Old Irish kingship is emphasized. One could almost think of a churchman as the author, if this were not contradicted by the drunkenness allowed at festive gatherings and in the king's drinking hall" (1917, 78).

Thurneysen's grounds for suspecting clerical authorship are typically perceptive, and such status need no longer be regarded as at all incompatible with that of poet or judge (ch. 1, 10-12). On the other hand, tolerance of drinking is no more cogent an argument against ecclesiastical authorship here than in the case of Saint Brigit's Old Irish Life, which refers to the monastic production of ale for consumption by visiting preachers and others on Church feasts (e.g., *Bethu Brigte*, pars. 21 and 28). Still more strikingly, a contemporary poem in praise of Áed Úa Foirréid, bishop of Armagh 1032-1056, edited by Gerard Murphy (1944, 140-64) flatters its recipient as "Áed, good bishop of Armagh, for whom maltings are brewed" (vs. 18, *Áed, epscop Aird Macha maith, dia ndéntar bracha do bruith*) presiding over "heavy drinking in his wattled house" (vs. 11, *ól 'na thig threbraid co trén*) and refers to his contemporary, the famous ecclesiastical scholar-poet Flann Mainistrech of Monasterboice, as "a magical mead-sage who quaffs ale" (vs. 31, *mid-suí síde súiges linn*).

The complex relationships between *Audacht Morainn*'s various extant versions have yet to be definitively clarified, but according to Binchy "there is a remarkable contrast between the A and B recensions of this text: the former, which Thurneysen mistakenly took to be older (see ZCP xiii.43ff., 298f.), contains a number of Christian loanwords as well as several counsels based on Christian teaching, whereas B has no loanwords (other than *clannaid* 'plants') and no specifically Christian sentiments" (1966, 3-4, n.3). Regarding the same B recension its most recent editor, Fergus Kelly (1976), asks "was *Audacht Morainn* composed by a cleric?" and replies "I would doubt this. Apart from a few Christian Latin loanwords (e.g. par. 59 *bendacht* 'blessing') and a reference to the Creator (par. 32 *dúilem*), *Audacht Morainn* seems devoid of Christian elements. If it were the work of a cleric, one

would surely expect him to attribute the prosperity of the territory not only to the king's justice (*fír flathemon*) but also to divine favour" (1988, 236).

Arguably, however, that is precisely what is conveyed by the highly significant reference to *dúilem*, an obvious calque on Latin *creator: ad:mestar dúili dúilemon do-da:rósat amal do:rósata* "let him estimate the creatures of the creator who has created them as they have been created" (par. 32). This precept is undoubtedly based upon the Christian Irish conceit (ch. 3, 10) that the ideal king Cormac mac Airt was a notable exception to the Pauline rule that prior to the coming of Christianity gentiles had missed the opportunity of worshipping God aright through his creation. As such, it is a product of learned ecclesiastical sophistry implying clerical authorship for *Audacht Morainn* as well as a concept of ruler's truth bound up with due regard for the Almighty. The A version remarks of kinslaying (*fingal*) that "it is avenged by God to the ninth man" (par. 38). Given that the three- or four-generation extended family termed the *derb-fine* comprised nine degrees of consanguinity (*derbfine co nónbor, CIH* 430.5), presumably reckoned inclusively from a member of the younger generation, this is probably an echo of Exodus 34:7 (cf. Deut. 5:9): "(Thou) who visitest the iniquity of the fathers on the sons and grandsons unto the third and fourth generation". The same recension also enjoins Christian orthodoxy on the king by warning "let him not sell the old faith for a new faith" (par. 43, *ní:ria sen-iris ar nua-iris*) and "let him not trust in false prophets, let him trust in the truth" (par. 51, *ní:n-erbba do sóeb-fáthib, n-a:n-erbba do fírinni*). Moreover, the oldest extant manuscript version of A, or at least of a recension very close to it, in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster (l in Thurneysen, 1917, 88) concludes with the precepts "let him not trust in paganism, let him trust in truth – it will sustain him" and "let him not trust in idols, let him trust in the God who is the best of gods, the God of heaven" (pars. 56-7: *na-ch:n-erbbad i ngentliucht, n-a:n-erbbad i fírinne, co-t:n-oaba . . . na-cha:n-erbbad i n-idlu, n-a:n-erbbad i nDía as dech deib, Día nime*).

This notion of the king's faith in and obedience to God as the linchpin of his truth and the benefits that flow from it is, of course, essentially biblical, being beautifully expressed by Psalm 71, for example: "give the king Thy judgement (*iudicium*), O God, and Thy justice (*iustitiam*) unto the king's son, to judge Thy people in justice and Thy poor in judgement (*iudicare populum tuum in iustitia et pauperes tuos in iudicio*). Let the mountains take up peace for the people and the hills judgement. He shall judge the poor of the people, and shall make safe the sons of the poor, and shall humble the disparager. It shall endure with the sun before the moon for generations of generations. It shall descend like showers upon a fleece and like rains dripping over the earth. Justice shall arise in his days and abundance of peace until the moon be removed, and he shall rule from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the world" (vs. 1-8).

Since the perfect justice and concomitant success of that paragon of pre-Patrician Irish kingship Cormac mac Airt are likewise ascribed to his "faith in the one God according to law" by *Senchas na Relec* (ch. 3, 10) and to the "judgements of the law of Moses" that he used to deliver by *Scél na Fír Flatha* (ch. 4, 7), it is hardly surprising that the gnomic tract fathered upon him, *Tecosca Cormaic*, opens with an unambiguous statement that the benefits accruing under a good and pious king ultimately flow from God: "O grandson of Conn, O Cormac", said Cairbre, "what is best for a king?" "Not difficult", said Cormac, "best for him (is) steadiness

without anger, patience without strife, affability without arrogance, concern for lore (*senchus*), reciprocation of truth, hostages in fetters, hosting with just cause, truth without venality, mercy with consolidation of law, peace to kingdoms, diverse sureties, true judgements, fasting on boundaries, exaltation of inviolate persons (*mórad nemed*), honouring of poets (*airmitiu filed*), worship of great God (*adrad Dé móir*), produce in his reign (*torud ina flaith*), regard for every unfortunate, many alms (*almsana ile*), mast on trees, fish in inlets, fruitful earth, ships putting into port, importing of riches, forfeit flotsam, silken raiment, a sword-smiting troop to protect every kingdom, attacks over borders, let him minister to the weak, let him cherish the strong, let him possess truth (*fír*), let him reprove falsehood (*gó*), let him love truth (*fírinne*), let him quell fear, let him suppress criminals, let him give true judgements (*fír-bretha*), let him feed everyone, let him consolidate every peace (*síd*), let him buy treasures, let him improve the soul (*lessaiged anmain*), let him recount every clear judgement, abundance of wine and mead, let him utter every truth. For it is through his ruler's truth that God gives all that (*ar is tria fír flaitheman do:beir Día in sin uile*)".

In the scheme of things worked out by early medieval Irish *literati* the ascription of Christian or biblical sentiments to Morann and Cormac well before Patrick's mission is not, of course, an anachronism but reflects their acknowledged status as pre-Patrician figures who believed in the one God and had access to basic divine truths such as Mosaic Law and Paul's teaching (ch. 3, 10). It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the three most comprehensive extant wisdom texts (see Kelly, 1988, 284-6) purporting to belong to the pre-Christian period in Ireland should be ascribed to such precocious believers or their close associates as Morann (*Audacht Morainn*), Cormac (*Tecosca Cormaic*) and Fíthal (*Senbríathra Fíthail*), who is presumably to be identified with the man named as Cormac's chief poet and judge in the passage from 'Cormac's dream' near the end of the previous section. These very ascriptions indicate that their authors regarded the texts in question as fundamentally compatible with Christian teaching, and there is little to commend Roland Smith's view of them as "a distinctly pagan tradition; wherever Christian elements have crept in, as they have in several cases, they must be considered late additions due to the desire on the part of Christian scribes to overcome the pagan traditions by tempering them with Christian motives" (1927, 412-3). Instead of asking what is specifically Christian about extant vernacular instructions for princes and the like, one might equally or more appropriately ask what they contain that is specifically pagan or unapplicable to early Christian Irish society. The answer is, little or nothing.

Although they cannot, of course, be absolutely disproved, claims that "clearly the genre was traditional and pre-literate and an integral part of the pagan liturgy of sovereignty" (Mac Cana, 1979, 448) are pure speculation, and it seems quite likely that a foundation provided by biblical wisdom texts was adapted to existing Irish ideas and institutions. Be that as it may, the texts available to us indicate that pre-Christian sacral principles had been assimilated at least as early as the mid-seventh century to a biblical concept of kingship by divine grace that belongs firmly in the mainstream of medieval Christian European thought. As Neil McLeod has pertinently remarked, "breaches against the inherent truth comprised in natural order could only bring disorder. Therefore, Truth could be revealed in a tradition of rulings which had proved to preserve harmony. To this Christianity added the element of the divine author" (1982, 362). This neat and economical approach apparently

made it possible to preserve many features of traditional kingship doctrine with a modicum of ecclesiastically sanctioned additions and subtractions that may have been limited enough in volume but had enormous ideological implications. In effect, a typical enough sacral kingship with pagan foundations was converted into a Christian monarchy under God's auspices at a stroke.

It thus transpires that, far from being a bizarre 'Celtic fringe' repository of barely adulterated pagan notions, early Christian Irish kingship theory had acquired a relatively unobtrusive but nevertheless pervasive biblical dynamic. This helps to explain the significant contribution it seems to have made to the moulding of the Carolingian *speculum regis/principis* or "prince's mirror" (cf. Anton, 1982, 568-617). The latter has been described as tending "to deemphasize the Augustinian concept that secular rule is a necessary evil imposed by God on the sinful nature of fallen man and to emphasize instead the Christian ruler's high moral responsibility to his people and to God", the basic assumption being "that good government will follow from the rule of a morally good man" (Eberle, 1987, 434). For instance, the description of Smaragdus' early ninth-century continental *via regia* as "a guide to Christian ruling. The king should be unequaled in wisdom, justice, prudence, humility, mercy, detachment, patience, receptiveness to counsel, and the love of God and neighbour" (Renna, 1986, 261) would be quite applicable to medieval Irish texts like *Audacht Morainn* or *Tecosca Cormaic*.

3. As McLeod further points out, the welfare of a people preeminently dependent upon their monarch's behaviour and qualities was explicitly linked by monastic lawyers with general uprightness and proper dues to God's Church. "There is a passage in the tract 'On the Confirmation of Right and Law', which emphasises the connection between law and the order of the universe, and in which the influence of Christianity is most explicit in the insinuation of the Church's right to alms" (ibid., 364). This runs as follows: "what are the three times in which his produce (*torad*) perishes for every ruler (*flaith*) so that there be loss in grain, dairy produce and mast (*ith ⁊ blicht ⁊ mes*)? An annulling of oblations, a freeing of serfs, a dissolution of tithes (*dechmad*), a release for slaves. There are three calamities which befall the world that are hardest: the coming of famine upon a people, bad contract, a plague coming upon them. There are three remedies which cure them: observance by judges lest they pass false judgement, alms from everyone from each produce (*almsana ó chách di chach thorad*), no statement of falsehood or false eyewitness in the kingdom (*túath*)" (*CIH* 231.15-31).

McLeod continues, "the imprint of the Church in regard to its financial affairs is still more distinct in the *Córus Béscna*, where this triad appears to occur in a more complete, and more successfully reworked, form: 'there are three times in which the world is disordered (deranged): the visitation period of an epidemic, the onslaught (?) of war, the dissolution of contracts. There are three things which cure them: 'tithes and firstfruits and alms which hold back the visitation period of an epidemic; The subduing [influence] of pacts [made] with king and kingdom which holds back the onslaught (?) of war; Everyone's holding to his good contract and his disadvantageous contract which holds back the derangement of the world'" (ibid., 365).

The Old Irish legal tract *Din Techtugud*, moreover, explicitly places an offence against the Church at the head of the seven major indications of a king's disqualificatory falsehood, and is in no doubt that retribution upon a people for their

or their king's mendacity stems ultimately from God: *a:taat .uii. fíadnaisi for:gellat gaí cach ríg: senad do soud asa n-airlisi cen fír cen dliged, détiu aíre inge mad tar cert, maidm catha fair, núna ina flaithius, dísce mlechta, milliud mesa, séol n-etha. It é .uii. béochaindlea and-so for:osnat gaí cach ríg. Teora gua ata moam do:fich Día for cach túaith: fuillem gúnadmae, forgell gúfíadnaise, gúbreth ar fochraic* "there are seven testimonies that attest the lie of every king: turning a synod (glossed "of the Church") out of their precinct without truth (and) without right, suffering of satire unless it be in spite of granting the claim, his defeat in battle, famines in his reign, drying up of dairy produce, ruin of mast, blight of grain. These are the seven living candles here which expose the falsehood of every king. The three greatest lies that God avenges on every kingdom: interest on a false surety, the bearing of false witness, a false judgement for reward" (*CIH* 219, 16-30).

The biblical ethos of this doctrine is unmistakable, given the Old Testament's insistence that Israel's fortune depends upon God's reaction to her success or failure in righteousness, observance of the law and the performance of religious duties such as the offering of tithes and firstfruits to God's house (e.g. Nehemiah 10:35-8). The connection between God-given calamities and the people's misbehaviour is repeatedly stressed as, for instance, in king Solomon's blessing upon Israel: "when heaven is shut up and it does not rain on account of their sins and they pray in that place and perform penitence in your name and turn from their sins on account of their affliction, hear them in heaven and remit the sins of Thy servants and of Thy people Israel, and shew them the good way on which they may walk and give rain upon Thy land which Thou hast given to Thy people for possession. If famine (*fames*) arise in the land or pestilence (*pestilentia*) or foul air, mildew, locust, rust and an enemy besieging her gates, . . . if any man shall recognise the plague of his own heart and spread out his hands in this house, Thou shalt hear in the place of Thy habitation and shalt be propitiated again and shalt so do that Thou give to each according to all his ways" (1/3 Kgs. 8:35-9).

Needless to say, under the kings the monarch's role assumes central importance in this equation. Thus the great summary of the Law in Deuteronomy urges that a future king "learn to fear the Lord his God and to preserve the words and ceremonies that are enjoined in the law" (17:19). Medieval Irish concern with looks, martial leadership and judgement of the king or his heir apparent (see 6 above) likewise have Old Testament analogues. For instance, in demanding a king the Israelites state "and we too shall be like all nations, and our king shall judge us and shall go forth before us and fight our battles for us" (1 Sam./Kgs. 8:20), while the young David's beauty is duly emphasised at his royal anointing by Samuel (1 Sam./Kgs. 16:12) and it is said of his eldest son that "there was no man in all Israel exceedingly beautiful and fair like Absalom - from the sole of his foot up to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him (*non erat in eo ulla macula*)" (2 Sam./Kgs. 14:25). As in Ireland, the king and his justice have wider cosmic repercussions determined by his relationship with Almighty God. David laments the death of king Saul with the words "mountains of Gilboa, let neither dew nor rain come upon you, and let there not be fields of firstfruits", while the Lord's prophet Elijah swears in God's name that there will be neither dew nor rain in wicked king Ahab's reign unless he says so (1/3 Kgs. 17:1). A natural metaphor closely akin to the mainspring of early Christian Irish notions of sovereignty occurs in David's "last words": "the just ruler of men, the ruler in fear of God, as the light of dawn

gloweth when the sun riseth in the morning from the clouds and as the grass sprouteth from the earth through rain" (2 Sam./Kgs. 23:3-4).

4. Such insistence upon the Church's relevance to a kingdom's overall welfare and the closely related ruler's truth or its opposite was an obvious legal reaction to the kind of polity presided over by early Christian Irish kings. Since this was founded upon *comúaim n-ecalsa fri túaith* or "the sewing together of Church onto State" (ch. 1, 11), it is hardly surprising to find a corresponding narrative response in a couple of sagas set in the post-Patrician period, namely *Aided Díarmata meic Fergusa Cerrbéoil* (O'Grady, 1892, 72-82) and *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca*. Both are concerned with Uí Néill dynasts supposed to have held the Tara kingship in the sixth century A.D. and, in their rather different ways, stress the importance of maintaining or restoring the connection between Church and State by portraying the negative effects of a rupture.

The former begins with Díarmait's exile from the Tara king Túathal Máelgarb and cooperation with St. Cíarán of Clonmacnoise in the founding of his church. In return for this he is promised the kingship, a prophecy soon fulfilled on Túathal's death. Thereafter king Díarmait offends Cíarán by burning, wounding and drowning an enemy on land he has just granted the saint. Although not prepared to jeopardise the king's salvation, rule or dynastic prospects, Cíarán does curse him to a similar threefold death in due course. Thus, after opening with an obvious instance of *comúaim n-ecalsa fri túaith* and its benefits to king and churchman alike, this tale introduces its major theme, the harm resulting from a breach in this essential relationship owing to royal failure to respect due rights of sanctuary on Church property (see ch. 4, 2 on the monastic "city of refuge").

After submitting himself and his descendants to Cíarán, Díarmait rules prosperously, but his peculiar end is foretold by the *fáid* or prophet Becc mac Dé. There follows a long episode about a further breach of sanctuary by Díarmait, who this time seizes an enemy being sheltered by St. Rúadán of Lothra and so incurs a year-long cursing of Tara by him and St. Brendan. The king capitulates and peace is made, but he predicts that Ireland and her churches will never be as well off as in his reign. This is followed by a highly significant vision.

"When Díarmait was there one night, ⟨And⟩ he saw a pair approaching him. It seemed to him there was a cleric's attire (*écosc cléirig*) on the one man and a layman's attire (*écosc laích*) on the other. They come towards him and strike his king's diadem from him and make a diadem for each of them. And each man had a half of it and they divide it between them thus. They go from him then. Díarmait awoke from his sleep after that and recounts his vision. 'True', said Becc mac Dé and Cáirid mac Findcháeme, Díarmait's poet, 'we have the interpretation of your dream. Your sovereignty (*flaithius*) has come to an end', he said, 'and it is an end to your kingship (*ríge*) and Ireland has now been deprived of your grip of sovereignty, i.e. division between Church and State (*roinn etir chill ocus túaith*), that is what there shall be henceforth. And that is what the division of your royal diadem foretells to us, namely division of the sovereignty of Ireland between State and Church (*roinn flaithesa Érenn etir thúaith ocus eclais*). But besides', he said, 'there will come a time when Church will be in thrall to State (*bus dóer eclais do thúaith*) so that there shall not be privilege of Church (*neimthes ecalsa*) but her being billeted upon by everyone. Moreover, evil will then come to lay society (*don túaith*) with

joint slaughter by the son, the father and the brother against each other so that everyone's arms will be red from their blood. The ground shall perish and the mast of trees and the produce of water through everyone's untruth (*ainfír*)'" (78-9).

The antidisestablishmentarian author of this linguistically late Middle Irish text is presumably basing this prophecy on evils of his own time, a clue to the likely date of composition being supplied by the fact "that sanctuary rights were a major issue in Church-State relations in Ireland in the eleventh century" (Radner, 1983, 193). In this way a current crisis can be unfavourably contrasted with conditions in an earlier golden age, when Church and State were beneficially interlocked under a true king despite the odd threatening hiccup.

The saga's finale is introduced when Díarmait executes a miscreant son of the king of Connacht despite his being under the protection (*comairce*) of Muirchertach mac Erca's two sons and St. Colum Cille alias Columba. This further breach of sanctuary causes the Gonnachtmen to turn against Díarmait and induces Colum Cille to assemble the Northern Uí Néill against the Southern Uí Néill monarch, who is defeated, returns to Tara and asks Becc mac Dé about the manner of his death. Becc himself then meets Colum Cille, accepts Christianity and dies, the epitome of the true prophet paving the way for Christianity. Díarmait is now left with his druids, who similarly foretell his peculiar death. Later, when a royal circuit of Ireland brings him to Ulster, he accepts an invitation to Banbán's hostel. Significantly, his wife Mugain refuses, leaving Díarmait free to accept the favours of Banbán's daughter. The various prophecies concerning his end are then fulfilled and the king duly perishes.

This lively tale represents Díarmait as a somewhat ambiguous figure in relation to the Church and Christianity. Although he cooperates with Cíarán, receives the saint's blessing and endows his church, as king he continues to associate with druids and the like too. The main blocks of the subsequent narrative are an escalating alienation from the Church triggered by three successive breaches of sanctuary. Relations with Cíarán after the first are soon mended by the king's submission to clerical authority, but the feud with Rúadán and company after the second lasts for a whole year until Díarmait eventually yields. The third and final delinquency against Colum Cille entails the king's defeat, and throws him back upon the druidic establishment, the best of whom, Becc mac Dé, is lost to the Church's side. Finally, Díarmait loses his wife's company as a prelude to the termination of his life and sovereignty at the hands of Banbán's beautiful daughter.

The steady decline in Díarmait's royal fortunes culminating in his death obviously correlates with his cumulative offences against and increasing isolation from the Church. As the Irish Canons remind us, "for Maximian, the king of the Romans, fell in war through laying heavy hands on God's churches" (*Can. Hib.* XXV, 15; *Maximianus namque rex Romanorum adgravans manus in ecclesias Dei cecidit in bello*).

Although discussions of *Aided Díarmata* and *Aided Muirchertaig* by Byrne (1973, 97-104) and Bhreathnach (1982) have effectively blotted out the Christian and ecclesiastical considerations that pervade both tales by concentrating upon the allegedly pagan motif of the king's threefold death, these narratives share with the legal maxims cited in the previous section an insistence that in post-Patrician Ireland there can be no ruler's truth without Christian faith in God and a proper respect for the Church. This aspect has, however, been duly emphasized in an admirable

recent study of these two stories by Joan Radner (1983, 191-8), who argues persuasively that "the threefold death . . . is in Celtic tradition an explicitly Christian narrative device" and that "tales of mysterious death reinforce their audiences' awareness that God is attending, that God is in control, and in the specific case of the threefold death tales, in which events are triggered by a human offence, that God will punish and purge significant wrongdoing" (ibid., 187). The moral is that "the power of the king and the power of the Church cannot coexist in opposition to one another. Concentrated in the story of the death of Diarmait, and carried strongly by its use of the threefold death plot, is one of the great themes of the Irish Church in the eleventh century: that peace and social stability are possible only through cooperation and alliance between secular overlords and the churches" (ibid., 194-5).

That said, we may turn to what O Hehir rightly terms "the highly Christianized *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca*" and sees as "an anti-goddess story, reversing the pagan polarities" (1983, 168). However, the fact that this text happens to survive only in a late Middle or even early Modern Irish recension falls well short of proof that an unattested "genuine original" has been tampered with later "by a Christian redactor bent on discrediting otherworld goddesses as queens" (ibid., 178). Its central Christian message might well have been there from the beginning, whenever that was - perhaps the eleventh century as suggested by Radner (1983, 198).

The story begins with the Tara king Muirchertach encountering the beautiful Sín and being so infatuated with her that he agrees to a liaison on her terms. Rejecting the usual valuable gifts, she insists "my name is never to be uttered by you, and Duaibsech, the mother of your children, is not to be in my presence, and clerics are never to come into the same house as me" (par. 4). They go to Tech Cletig on the Boyne, the excellence of whose Uí Néill denizens is stressed, whereupon Sín has Duaibsech, her children and the Uí Néill magnates expelled (par. 8). Duaibsech flees to her confessor (*anmchara*), the saintly bishop Cairnech of Dulane, who brings the Northern Uí Néill to Tech Cletig, is rebuffed by Sín and angrily curses the place and its king while blessing the rest of the Northern Uí Néill (pars. 9-12). The conflict continues with Muirchertach vacillating between the clerics and Sín, who uses various magical devices of inebriation and delusion to keep a grip on him as "the black parody continues with a lavish Samain feast - simultaneously a pastiche of the goddess's ale-feast, the Biblical wedding at Cana, and the Christian communion ritual - in which Muirchertach consumes wine and flesh magically produced by the *síd*-woman from Boyne water and bracken. In her power his sovereignty is not assured, but destroyed; he is poisoned, weakened, doomed. Phony goods all along the line: and he has taken these extinct symbols of the pagan sacral kingship in preference to his own earthly lineage, his confessor St. Cairnech, and the Church" (Radner, 1983, 197).

Finally, Muirchertach is put to death by burning, wounding and drowning in accordance with Cairnech's curse, but is given a Christian burial in Dulane. Duaibsech dies of grief and is buried with him (par. 46). Sín then appears to the clerics and reveals that she acted to avenge Muirchertach's slaughter of her parents and sister in a crushing victory over the *sen-túatha Temrach* or "old (i.e. vassal) tribes of Tara" (par. 49). In the end she too makes confession, dies and is buried, and Cairnech eventually succeeds with considerable difficulty in rescuing Muirchertach's soul from hell.

Muirchertach's sovereignty here disintegrates in a tussle symbolised by two consorts who stand for quite different values. On the one hand, there is his first wife Duaibsech, a pious aristocrat supported by the Church and the main branches of the Northern Uí Néill, and on the other there is Sín, the anticlerical enchantress of vassal stock. All was well with Muirchertach's reign until he cast off Duaibsech along with all she represented and allowed Sín to lead a revolution deeply offensive to the Christian Irish establishment on both religious and social or political grounds, favouring as it did paganism and the plebs. The results were predictably catastrophic, but the Church and her noble supporters ultimately triumphed and order was restored.

As Radner perceptively remarks, the author of *Aided Muirchertaig* "has structured it by careful manipulation of many traditional motifs and themes, including several especially characteristic of stories set in the pre-Christian 'heroic' era, in order to say that in Christian Ireland the very nature of traditional kingship has changed" (1983, 196). Indeed, this struggle for the king's affections and soul between a virtuous Christian woman and a wicked pagan witch of sovereignty can be seen as a narrative expression of the diverse origins of good and bad rule put thus by the Irish Canons: *omnis ordinatio a Deo, opera autem maligna a diabolo* "every good governance is from God, but wicked works are from the devil" (*Can. Hib.* XXV, 15).

5. The fact that the 'goddess' of sovereignty's various representations in medieval Irish literature undoubtedly owe a good deal to divine pagan antecedents does not, of course, necessarily imply anything like a one to one relationship between individual literary manifestations and presumed pre-Christian deities of this kind.

Women such as Medb or Eithne whose names occur repeatedly in appropriate contexts are the most likely to be directly rooted in earlier sovereignty goddesses (cf. ch. 5, 3), but even here the type may be so radically altered as to make such an ascription well nigh meaningless in some texts. This, for instance, is the basic point made by O'Rahilly regarding queen Medb's attributes in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and associated Ulster tales: "she is no longer a goddess but a masterful woman, with the inevitable result that her character has sadly degenerated, so much so that at times she is no better than a strong-willed virago with unconcealed leanings towards a multiplicity of husbands and paramours" (1943, 15-6). Conversely, historical or legendary human queens may attract mythico-literary sovereignty motifs like magnets, a possibility recently elucidated by W. Ann Trindade (1986) with reference to the literary reflexes of three historical Gormlaiths of the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries respectively. Since questions about origins are irrelevant to the present concern with attested narrative functions, it seems best to term such figures in the literature 'women' rather than 'goddesses' of sovereignty in order to avoid confusion.

The approach of pre-Norman Ireland's monastic *literati* to supernaturally endowed figures in their *senchus* was varied within the confines of a typical enough medieval western outlook. One obvious possibility was to doubt their actual existence, as when the twelfth-century scribe of the *LL-Táin* refers, in a famous postscript, to figments of the poetic imagination (*figmenta poetica*, l. 4923). An alternative was the so-called 'euhemeristic' notion of great men posthumously acquiring divine or semi-divine attributes.

This was the line adopted by that polymath prelate Isidore of Seville in the section on pagan gods in his *Etymologiae* entitled *de dis gentium*: "those whom the pagans declare to be gods are exposed as having once been men, and on account of their individual lives and deserts they began to be cultivated among their own people after death" (*quos pagani deos asserunt, homines olim fuisse produntur, et pro uniuscuiusque vita vel meritis coli apud suos post mortem coeperunt;*, VIII xi 1). *Cóir Anmann*'s treatment of Manannán mac Lir constitutes an explicit medieval Irish application of such reasoning: "Manannán mac Lir, i.e. Oirbsen was his name, i.e. he was a marvellous merchant who was in the Isle of Man, i.e. he is the best steersman there was on the sea in the West of the world. He used to discover through his meteorology, i.e. through his observation of the sky's or the air's appearance, how long the good or the bad weather would last and when each of them would change into the other. And it is on that account that the Britons and the men of Ireland reckoned him to be the god of the sea and he was called Mac Lir, i.e. Son of the Sea" (par. 156).

A commoner approach, however, seems to have been the acceptance of non-human supernatural status and an explanation of this either in diabolical or in angelic terms, the only two such alternatives compatible with Christian cosmology. The postscript to the *LL-Táin* leans towards the former in speaking of *praestrigia demonum* or "delusions of demons" (l. 4923; cf. Isidore, *Etym.* VIII ix 33, *dictum enim praestigium quod praestringat aciem oculorum*), while the early twelfth-century main scribe of *LU* concludes his copy of the tale *Serglige Con Culainn* with the following strictures: "so that that is a destructive apparition (*taidbsiu aidmillti*) to Cú Chulainn by the folk of the *síd*. For great was the devilish power before faith (*in chumachta demnach ria creitim*) and its extent was such that the demons used to fight bodily with the people and that they used to show delights and secrets to them as if they existed. It is thus that they used to be believed in, so that it is those apparitions that the ignorant call *síd*s and folk of the *síd*". That monastic debate on this topic was by no means one sided is indicated by the claim in an important passage at the end of *Scél na Fír Flatha* (see 10 below) that the display of "wondrous apparitions" to kings of yore was regarded by ecclesiastical scholars (*ecnaidi*) as a godly and not a devilish ministration (*conid timthirecht díada . . . ⁊ conach timthirecht demnach*).

6. In Ireland, as in other parts of Christendom, a special version of the euhemerist line with considerable appeal was sanctification, a process which will be further illustrated in the next chapter. This made it possible for pagan deities or heroes and their more desirable attributes to be appropriated by the Church through transformation into saints, rather as the very word *nóeb* in Irish acquired the value "holy, saint" in a specifically Christian sense (ch. 1, 7). An interesting narrative combination of this approach with the diabolical assessment is found in the intriguing saga *Altram Tige dá Medar*, the essential contents of which may be rather older than the extant Modern Irish version.

After some necessary synthetic historical preliminaries centring upon the Túatha Dé Danann (pars. 1-2), the tale begins with their king Manannán's machinations to expel his host Elcmar from Brug na Bóinne in favour of his fosterson Óengus. Manannán urges Óengus to accomplish this by means of "the charm (*sén*) whereby the angels came from the King of heaven and from the Lord of the universe and the

charm (*sén*) whereby we separated Ireland's sovereignty (*flaithes Fótla*) from the Fir Bolg and the charm (*sén*) whereby the sons of Míl separated the precedence over Ireland (*oirechas Éirenn*) from us in turn" (par. 4). To Óengus's question "is there a god above our gods (*in fuil día ós ar ndeib-ne?*) Manannán replies that indeed there is, the invincible Almighty God (*int áen-Día uile-chumachtach*), Creator of heaven, earth, sea and the four elements. He then goes on to explain that this God "created ten orders of angels around him and, as to the lord of the tenth order, pride and vanity arose in his mind and they left the plain of heaven unnecessarily. God (banished) the tenth order from his territory . . . and formed men . . . and put the group that had arrogantly left his territory into the shapes of demons (*i ndelbaib deman*)". Men's fate is determined by whether they side with God or these devils (par. 4). Elcmar is then expelled from the Brug despite Óengus's feelings of guilt (par. 5).

This doctrine presumably reflects the claim in Isidore's *Etymologiae* that there is scriptural support for nine orders of angels (VII iv 4; *novem autem esse ordines angelorum sacrae Scripturae testantur, id est angeli, archangeli, throni, dominationes, virtutes, principatus, potestates, cherubim et seraphim*) in addition to the wicked fallen angels turned devils (ibid., 30; *hic est ordo vel distinctio angelorum qui post lapsum malorum in caelesti vigore steterunt*). Thus God's righteous expulsion of the fallen angels or devils to be a source of damnation for themselves and of temptation for mankind is misused as "druidry and devilry (*draídecht ⁊ díabaltacht*)" by the king of the Túatha Dé Danann on earth to dispossess one of his subjects.

There follows the account of Eithne's birth and early life among the Túatha Dé with Óengus in the Brug until an insult from the latter's brother makes it impossible for her to consume food in their company apart from the milk of two special cows from holy India milked by her own hands. The cause is ultimately divined by Manannán, who says that as a result of Eithne's shaming "her guardian devil (*a deman comaitechta*) has gone (from . . .) her heart and an angel (*aingel*) has come in its place, and that does not allow our food into her breast and she will not worship druidry or devilry (*ní:aidéra si draídecht na díablaigecht*) henceforth . . . and it will be the three-personed . . . Trinity that shall be the God of worship (*Día adartha*) for that maiden" (par. 8).

Eithne lived in this way for centuries until Patrick's arrival in Ireland and the banishment of druids and demons (*díchor druad ⁊ demon*) in Lóegaire mac Néill's reign. One day near the Boyne she left her Túatha Dé Danann friends and began taking instruction from a cleric. Finally, Patrick himself intervened to prevent Óengus from recovering her. She then commended her soul to God and Patrick, died, released her spirit to heaven, was buried and gave her name to Cell Eithne or "Eithne's Chapel" at Brug na Bóinne (pars. 9-12).

As pointed out by Claire Dagger (1985), this tale obviously articulates a transition from pagan deity to Christian saint, the probability being that at least some of the known St. Eithnes, including the ten listed in *Comainmniugud Náem Hérend* (Brosnan, 1912, 358; Ó Riain, 1985, 140-56), have roots in various local manifestations of the identically named sovereignty goddess best known as Eithne Tháebfata (ch. 5, 3 and 12). If so, the christianization of sovereignty itself would seem to be implied here, and it may be added that *Altram Tige dá Medar* offers a pointed and structurally central contrastive parallelism between the wicked angels' departure

from the holy company of heaven for damnation and Eithne's abandonment of her demonic Túatha Dé Danann kith and kin for salvation. The heroine's demise in such contexts is an obvious expression of her death to paganism and resurrection in Christianity.

Tírechán presents a striking analogue or even antecedent in his famous seventh-century description (par. 26; Bieler, 1979, 142-5) of Patrick's encounter at the well of Clíabach (cf. 3 above) beside the royal site of Crúachu with Eithne the white (*alba*) and Fedelm the red (*rufa*), both daughters of the Tara monarch Lóegaire, who remains a pagan in Tírechán's narrative (par. 12). These question the saint about his God and receive a lyrical reply concluding with the words "now, indeed, I wish to join you to a Heavenly King since you are the daughters of an earthly king ⟨,if you wish⟩ to believe" (par. 26, 12; *ego uero uolo uos regi caelesti coniungere dum filiae regis terreni sitis ⟨,si uultis (?)⟩ credere*). They duly believe, are baptized, take communion and die so that they may behold the Heavenly King forthwith. Their druid fosterers come to mourn and are both eventually converted. Moreover, the burial mound with the bones of the two holy virgins becomes the site of a church (par. 26, 21) and Eithne daughter of Lóegaire is listed as a saint (Ó Riain, 1985, 155).

7. Watson (1986) has recently made a good case for a thematic orientation towards sovereignty in *Echtra Nerai*. One might further suggest that this relatively old saga's distinctly unpleasant aura helps to highlight the unredeemed and malignant nature of a pagan otherworld source of kingship liable to destroy unless destroyed.

The setting is a feast held on Samain eve by Ailill and Medb at Crúachu the day after "two captives (*cimbid*) had been crucified (*ro:crochtha*) by them". In return for a prize a challenge is issued along the same lines as in the commentary on *gell fri saigid n-omna* "a pledge for facing fear" in a legal heptad (*CIH* 18.20-31). This entails placing a chain (*id*) on the foot of a captive on the cross (*issin chroich*), but all except Nerae are unnerved by the darkness (*dorchatu*) and awfulness (*grándatu*) of a night on which "demons (*demna*) used regularly to appear". In view of this text's penchant for sets of three the presence of only two crucified captives may be intended to hint at a missing third, perhaps Christ himself between the two thieves crucified on either side of him (e.g. Mark 15:27). Arguably, then, this grim opening (pars. 1-2) acts as a cue for the absence of Christian redemption and presence of malefactors and demons in the narrative about to unfold.

When one of the captives asks for a drink, Nerae takes him on his back. After passing two houses surrounded by fire and water respectively, they reach a third containing three vessels of dirty water. The captive drinks from each, kills the inmates by spraying them with the last draught, and is returned to his cross (pars. 3-6). This episode associating impurity and death with a drink elsewhere prone to symbolize kingship (cf. 3 above and Bhreathnach, 1982, 256-9) leads Watson, on the strength of a somewhat different analysis of the details, to the plausible conclusion that "the captive's search is a negative paradigm which indicates what sovereignty must not be" (1986, 133). Watson also rightly insists that it be taken in conjunction with two further episodes involving the carrying of burdens (ibid., 132-7).

Having witnessed Crúachu's destruction by fire and the sword, Nerae follows the perpetrators into the nearby *síd*-mound of Crúachu, where the king gives him a

consort and sets him the daily task of bringing firewood to his fort (par. 6). The imposition of the same menial labour upon the heroic Ogmae was one of king Bres's infringements of propriety in *Cath Maige Tuired* (par. 37), and Watson is doubtless right in seeing the *síd*-king's behaviour as a sign of his inadequacy (ibid., 134).

While carrying his own burden, Nerae saw every day a blind man bearing a cripple to a well to ascertain from him whether something was still there. When Nerae questions his wife, she informs him that the object in the well is a gold diadem worn on the king's head. She also assures him that the sack of Crúachu was a premonition of what would happen the following Samain unless prevented by destruction of the *síd*-folk (par. 8). This is ultimately accomplished with her help, and the "crown of Brión (*barr Briúin*)" is carried off from the well as she had promised along with "the mantle of Lóegaire (*cétach Lóegairi*) in Armagh and the tunic of Dúnlang (*enech Dúnlainge*) among the Leinstermen in Kildare" (par. 19, cf. 9).

Various other aspects of this elaborate story, such as those relating to its role as an explanatory prelude to the Táin, have been discussed by Watson and need not concern us here. What is clear is that Nerae and his captive passenger's deadly encounter with the house containing three vessels both correlates and contrasts with the visits of the blind man with the lame man on his back to the well containing the three great talismans of sovereignty over Connacht, the Uí Néill and Leinster respectively. Whereas murder of the house's harmless inmates brings the malevolent captive no gain, destruction of the *síd*'s baneful inhabitants yields its justified human perpetrators these three tangible benefits, emphasis being upon the *barr Briúin* in a tale centring upon Connacht's chief royal site. Equally significant is the information that at least two of these major emblems of kingship are now located in great monasteries. A central message of our text, then, is that they, and consequently the sovereignty embodied by them, have been released from a moribund and demonic pagan environment into proper Christian custody.

8. In marked contrast to *Altram Tige dá Medar*'s location of the Túatha Dé Danann in the diabolical Brug, *Echtra Airt meic Cuinn* places them on an insular *tír tairngiri* or "land of promise" of the type encountered in *Immram Brain* and *Echtrae Chonlai* (ch. 3, 13). Bécuma's expulsion from this paradise for committing a sin and her subsequent mischief-making among men in Ireland (par. 3) can be seen as a microcosm of the behaviour and fate of the fallen angels alluded to at the beginning of section 6. Conn's reign of paradisaical plenty in Ireland, when "nothing was lacking" and "they used to reap the grain crops thrice every year" (par. 1), is blighted by his liaison with this beautiful but evil woman (see ch. 5, 12), a situation reminiscent of God's cursing of the hitherto bountiful earth after Adam's temptation by Eve (Gen. 3:17) and further reminiscent of Jeremiah's plaintive question: "how long shall the land mourn and the herbs of every region wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? The animal is consumed, and the bird" (12:4).

After ascribing these misfortunes to his wife's depravity and lack of faith (*ar los corbaid mná Cuind ⁊ gan creitim aice*), Conn's druids tell of "the one from whom their remedy (*leiges*) will come, namely the son of a non-carnal couple (*mac lánamna nem-cholaide*) to be brought to Ireland, killed at the entrance of Tara and his blood mixed with Tara's earth" (par. 8). Conn duly sets out across the sea on this quest and reaches a wondrous island where he is offered glorious hospitality by a couple

from the "land of promise" and the "land of wonders" who, like their parents before them, had only departed from their chastity once in order to produce their son Ségdae Sáerlabraid. Despite his parents initial reluctance, Ségdae is allowed to assist Conn by coming to Ireland under the protection of various of her potentates (par. 11).

On Ségdae's arrival there is a contention between his protectors and the druids, who bay for his blood. In despair Ségdae declares his readiness to be put to death. However, a woman, who turns out to be Ségdae's mother, appears with a cow to sacrifice in his stead. When it is cut up, two bags are opened and found to contain a one- and a twelve-legged bird respectively. Surprisingly, the one-legged bird is victorious in a fight between them, the moral drawn by the woman for the men of Ireland being "you are the twelve-legged bird and the little lad the one-legged bird, since it is he who represents the truth (*óir is é a:tá arin fírindi*)". She goes on to command the seizure and execution of the druids before telling Conn that a third of Ireland's corn, milk products and mast will still be lacking as long as he retains the depraved Bécuma. When, however, he replies that he cannot put her away, mother and son depart. There ensues the final part of the tale, already discussed (ch. 5, 12), where Bécuma uses a game of *fidchell* to send Art in quest of her *alter ego* Delbcháem.

The son of parents from paradise, the sinless Ségdae is ready to die in order to save others but is snatched back from the jaws of death to paradise, leaving the restoration of the men of Ireland's beatitude incomplete as long as the she-devil Bécuma is still in their midst. This obvious allegory of Christian redemption has been perceptively commented on by O Hehir, who also notes that "the substitution of the cow for the boy is modeled on the sacrifice of Isaac" (1983, 174). The victory of the bird with one leg over its twelve-legged rival presumably betokens the superiority of true belief in the one true God over pagan belief in a plurality of deities, a message hammered home by the contrast between Ségdae's survival and the destruction of his druidic would-be executioners. In the first half of this story the corrupted sovereignty's fate is in the balance between the redemption offered by the christlike Ségdae and his near-virgin mother on the one hand and the deterioration brought about by the demonic Bécuma on the other.

The upshot is a pre-Patrician or 'Old Testament' prefiguration of the Church's indispensable contribution to ruler's truth and its attendant blessings in the Christian period (3 and 4 above). Indeed, with due reservations about unprovable claims as to the lateness of its composition and addition to "the last half of the story" continuing "the essential substance of the lost older tale that is named in saga-list B" (see ch. 5, 12), one can hardly help agreeing with O Hehir's verdict that "the entire first half of the extant text of *Eachtra Airt meic Cuind ocus Tochmarc Delbchaime ingine Morgain* can therefore be seen as a late and entirely Christian invention" (1983, 179).

9. Thus the woman of sovereignty may not only appear as hideous, lowly or deranged, pending the release of her glorious potential to the right spouse and his subjects, but conversely may also conceal beneath a glamorous exterior a malign or diabolical disposition destructive to her royal mate and damaging to his kingdom. The comparative evidence (ch. 5, 2-5) indicates that the pagan sovereignty goddess was something of a chameleon whose main attributes were merely symptomatic of

the presence or absence of a worthy royal consort rather than inherently good or bad. That being so, it looks as though the dichotomy between the essentially virtuous and the morally flawed royal bride in medieval Irish literature reflects the fundamental Christian cosmological duality neatly applied to kingship in the citation from the eighth-century Irish canons at the end of section 4 above: "every good governance is from God, but wicked works are from the devil", a theological principle manifestly connected with the same book's contrast between "the justice of a just king" and "the iniquity of an unjust king" (see 2 above).

It is, moreover, worth recalling that the Bible itself, perhaps as a distant reflex of the ancient Mesopotamian *hieros gamos* (ch. 5, 3), contains some striking images of women as royal spouses and territorial symbols.

The Apocalypse introduces a particularly obvious diabolical figure of this type in "the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication (*cum qua fornicati sunt reges terrae*), and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her harlotry (*de vino prostitutionis eius*) . . ., a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet and gilded with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication (*habens poculum aureum in manu sua plenum abominationum et immunditia fornicationis eius*) . . . And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus . . . And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdoms as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them" (Rev. 17:1-4, 6 and 12-4).

Representation of Israel or Jerusalem as a bride, widow or the like in various conditions is well attested in the prophets. For instance, a prediction of Israel's future greatness in Isaiah 54 contains the following striking passages: "praise, O barren one that dost not bear (1, *lauda sterilis quae non paris*) . . . For he who made thee shall be lord over thee; the Lord of hosts is his name . . . For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieving in spirit and a rejected wife of youth" (6, *quia ut mulierem derelictam et maerentem spiritu vocavit te Dominus et uxorem ab adulescentia abiectam*). The well-known opening of Lamentations likens the desolate Jerusalem to a once prosperous widow who has been deserted and has fallen on bad times: "how doth the city (once) full of people sit solitary; the mistress of nations (*domina gentium*) hath become as a widow . . . She hath lamented dolefully in the night and her tears are on her cheeks; there is none to comfort her from all her lovers (*ex omnibus caris eius*); all her friends have despised her and are become her enemies". This basic image and idea may well have influenced the famous and similarly oriented Old Irish verse lament of the Old Woman of Beare (*caillech Bérri*; ed. Ó hAodha, 1989), whose connection with the sovereignty has been most recently discussed by Ó Cathasaigh (1989, 33-8).

Ezekiel 16 offers what is, perhaps, the most sustained metaphor of this kind in the Old Testament in response to the exhortation "son of man, make known her abominations to Jerusalem" (2). God's word concerning her unpropitious birth and subsequent elevation to beauty and prosperity is reported as follows: "and when I passed by thee, I saw thee downtrodden in thine own blood and I said to thee when

thou wast in thy blood, Live . . . I have granted thee to be multiplied as the bud of the field, and thou hast been multiplied and made great, and hast entered and attained a woman's ornament (*mundum muliebrem*): thy breasts have filled out and thine hair hath sprouted (*ubera tua intumuerunt et pilus tuus germinavit*), and thou wast naked (*nuda*) and full of confusion. And I passed by thee and beheld thee and, lo, thy time was the time for lovers (*tempus amantium*), and I spread my mantle over thee and covered thine ignominy and I sware unto thee and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine (*et facta es mihi*). And I washed thee with water . . ., and clothed thee with different hues . . ., and clad thee with finery, and decked thee with ornament . . ., and I set a jewel above thy visage, and rings in thine ears and a crown of beauty upon thine head . . ., and thou becamest quite exceedingly beautiful and didst prosper into a kingdom (*et decora facta es vehementer nimis et profecisti in regnum*). And thy name went forth among the nations for thy beauty, since thou wast perfect in my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God" (6-14). Thereafter, however, Jerusalem plays the harlot "as an adulterous wife who takes in strangers in addition to her husband" (32) and is duly threatened with retribution along with "thy sisters, who have abandoned their husbands and their sons . . . thine elder sister Samaria . . . thy younger sister . . . Sodom and her daughters" (45-6).

The Bible, then, individually equates various cities and countries, particularly Jerusalem and Israel, with women whose physical condition, prosperity and happiness depend upon the bestowal or withdrawal of God's favour, a relationship liable to be expressed in sexual terms. The woman may also take various earthly lovers, albeit usually at the cost of her divine husband's jealousy, and finally may become so wanton as to figure as an agent of the devil.

It can thus be seen that there was no lack of obvious biblical models to which inherited Irish concepts of the female embodiment of sovereignty could be at least partially assimilated. In effect, the condition of the Old Testament women in question serves as an index of God's satisfaction or dissatisfaction, as the case might be, with the rulers and people of the kingdoms symbolized by them. That being so, it would presumably have been easy enough for medieval Ireland's monastic men of letters to interpret the transformations undergone by their own women of sovereignty as comparable tokens of God's attitude towards a king and his kingdom. This approach would, of course, be applicable to the pre- as well as the post-Patrician period, given the early Christian Irish belief, already amply documented (e.g. ch. 3, 7-10; ch. 4, 4-9), in the role of divine providence and revelation from the very beginning of their history.

In that case, pre-Christian Irish kingship would constitute a typological anticipation of its Christian counterpart (cf. ch. 4, 9), and the woman of sovereignty, instead of being an antiquarian pagan anomaly, would have acquired a narrative role in keeping with contemporaneous Christian notions of a kingship *Dei gratia*, in which the benefits of the ruler's truth flowed ultimately from God (see 2-4 above). Their ascription of this insight to Cormac mac Airt himself (2 above) shows that monastic *literati* regarded this essentially Old Testament model of sovereignty as a feature of the pre- as well as the post-Patrician era.

10. Since even in the patriarchal period of the Old Testament prior to the Mosaic covenant God might speak to chosen individuals either directly or through the

medium of angels, it is no surprise that similar possibilities were envisaged in Ireland's ostensibly pre-Christian *senchus*. Mention has already been made of the wise giant Trefuilngid's status as "an angel of God" or "God himself" appearing to the men of Ireland under their king long ago in *Do Suidigud Tellaich Temra*, but the conclusion of *Scél na Fír Flatha* referred to at the end of section 5 above is of particular interest: "but the ecclesiastical scholars say that every time a wondrous apparition (*taidbse ingnad*) used to be shown to the royal rulers (*dona ríg-flathaib*) of yore - as the Scál revealed to Conn and as the land of promise (*tír tairngiri*) was shown to Cormac - it was a godly ministration that used to come in that guise and not a devilish ministration. Moreover, (it is) angels that used to come to help them, since it is natural truth (*fírindi aicnid*) that they used to follow and it is the commandment of law (*timna rechta*) that served them".

There is an obvious allusion here to *Baile in Scáil* and to that part of *Scél na Fír Flatha* (pars. 25-54) commonly known as *Echtra Cormaic i Tír Tairngiri*, both texts primarily about sovereignty. In the former a mist descends upon Conn Cétchathach and his companions before clearing to reveal a fine house containing a maiden called *flaith Érenn* "the sovereignty of Ireland" and the phantom or *Scál* himself, who prophesies concerning Conn and his successors in the Tara kingship with each drink that the maiden draws (ch. 5, 3). Interpretation of the Scál as God's agent surely places the woman of sovereignty associated with him firmly on the side of the angels, so to speak.

In the second tale Cormac is visited by a fair youth holding a musical silver branch with a trinity of fruits (ch. 3, 13) "from a land that has only truth . . . and neither age nor decay nor sorrow nor pain nor rage nor jealousy nor hatred nor pride" (par. 27). Cormac's acquisition of the branch by granting three requests enables his visitor to remove the trio of the king's daughter, son and wife Eithne Tháebfata in succession to this sinless paradise, whither Cormac sets off in search of them. On arrival in a fine palace there, he is given two striking lessons in the threefold nature of truth. Firstly, he encounters a pig that can only be cooked by the recitation of a truth over each quarter (pars. 37-52). Three truths relating to stock and crops are so uttered to render it three-quarters done, Cormac then recounting the fourth to complete the process in a manner obviously relevant to the tripartite structure of nature and society integrated and made whole by the king's truth (ch. 5, 4 and 9-10). Cormac's family is then restored to him and he is shown a cup which breaks in three when "three words of falsehood (*téora bríathra bréice*)" are uttered over it but becomes whole again with the speaking of "three true confessions (*téora coibsena fíra*)", an image not only equivalent to that underlying the tale of Lugaid Ríabderg's conception (ch.5, 4) but also fully in keeping with the Augustinian doctrine that all truth is recognised by its threefold compatibility with nature, Scripture and informed conscience (ch. 4, 4). At any rate, the desired reintegration is accomplished when Cormac's host declares "that neither your wife nor your daughter has seen the face of a male phantom (*ferscál*) since they were brought from Tara until today and that your son has not seen the face of a female phantom (*banscál*)" (par. 52) before revealing himself as Manannán mac Lir, king of the land of promise, and explaining that Cormac has been deliberately lured there to witness these wonders (par. 53). The king awoke on the morrow to find himself on the green of Tara with his family of three, the branch with its three fruits and the three-in-one cup "which used to distinguish truth and falsehood for the Gael" (*no:deilged fírindi ⁊ gaí i Gaedelu*, par. 54) during Cormac's lifetime.

There can be no doubt that this tale functions in *Scél na Fír Flatha* as an allegory of Cormac's attainment of the truth of God's law that was the bedrock of his regal excellence according to this and other texts (ch. 3, 10-11; ch. 4, 7). In effect, the sovereignty personified by his wife Eithne is briefly withdrawn from him only to be returned in a newly perfected form born of a sojourn in the sinless paradise that is the home of truth and angelic beings. The king of these, Manannán, can be seen as an allegory of God himself here as in *Immram Brain*, in which the close of Manannán's great poem about paradise, the fall of man and Christ's redemptive incarnation draws a patent parallel between this and his own mission from the land of promise to the world of men in order to sire a remarkable son upon a mortal woman. What Cormac is allegorically vouchsafed in this tale is nothing less than a divine revelation about the three-in-one nature of the truth essential to the proper exercise of kingship. Whatever its pagan Indo-European and Celtic roots, a trinitarian concept of sovereign's truth linking the human and divine worlds had an obvious potential for Christian exploitation.

Furthermore, the notion of angelic guardians and revealers of sovereignty such as the Scál or Manannán in pre-Christian Ireland would conform nicely to Isidore's doctrine "that there is no place over which angels do not preside" (*Etym.* VII v 29 *nullum esse locum cui angeli non praesint*), itself explicitly deduced from the words of the angel to the prophet Daniel: "but the prince of the kingdom of the Persians withstood me one and twenty days: and, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes (i.e. of angels, *unus de principibus primis*), came to help me; and I remained there beside the king of the Persians" (Dan. 10:13).

In medieval Irish myth the beneficial woman of sovereignty mediates, as it were, between an otherworld susceptible to depiction as a sinless paradise presided over by the likes of Manannán and the sinful world of men governed by their kings. This status is both functionally and allegorically comparable to that of the biblical brides of God and earthly monarchs referred to in 9 above.

In early Irish literature such women symbolize the various destinies of individuals eligible for the kingship, being represented not only as bestowers but also as withholders or withdrawers of true sovereignty. The beautiful woman who fleetingly appears to Cormac Conn Loinges in token of the imminent slipping of the Ulster kingship from his grasp (ch. 5, 11) is a case in point, but death or incapacity were not the sole catalysts of failure to become king. For instance, in the Christian period it was common enough for scions of royal houses to embark upon ecclesiastical careers. The nobly born St. Laisrén's refusal of the kingship offered him for an eremetic existence in his Salamanca Life (par. 7; Heist, 1965, 7) and the pious clerical career of the sixth-century king of Connacht's son Cellach in *Caithréim Cellaig* are obvious literary examples. Typical enough historical instances are provided by the archbishop Áed Dub and abbot Óengus of Kildare, brother and nephew respectively of the seventh-century king of Leinster Fáelán mac Colmáin (cf. McCone, 1982, 110).

It has been seen that monastic ideals are highly germane to *Echtrae Chonlai*'s account of the overseas woman's conflict with the evil druid to rescue the legendary Tara monarch Conn Cétchathach's son Connlae from secular mortality among his own people to everlasting sinless bliss in the Land of the Living. Insofar as she thereby decides both his fate regarding the succession and that of the future king of Tara, his brother Art, it seems legitimate to regard her as at least having

significant affinities with the mythical woman of sovereignty. However, this in no way detracts from the demonstrable role of Connlae's beloved as a symbol of the Church in accordance with an allegorical principle readily applied to Old Testament brides like Esther, the Persian emperor's consort "in the image of God's Church" (*sub figura ecclesiae Dei*; Isidore, *Etym.* VI ii 29) who struggled to save her people from Aman's wicked machinations (see ch. 3, 13).

If the wife or lover of a king or his heir apparent can be allegorized as the Church in *Echtrae Chonlai* as in standard medieval biblical exegesis, the possibility surely presents itself that this equation was applied more or less generally to the woman of sovereignty in her benign aspect by the monastic writers of early Irish sagas. If so, the successful liaison of such a figure with an actual or prospective king should be seen as a highly effective device for giving typological prefiguration and narrative realization to the cornerstone of successful rule in early Christian Ireland, namely *comúaim n-ecalsa fri túaith* or "the union of Church with State" (see 4 above). Clearly failure with or separation from a woman of this type or association with a diabolical counterpart would be similarly apt as a means of representing a breach in this indispensable symbiosis.

The early Christian Irish 'goddess' or woman of sovereignty, then, may well be the end-product of the ecclesiastical enrichment of potent native symbols with biblical concepts and exegetical insights to provide vital current concerns with appropriate historical justification and literary expression. At all events, her mythical attributes can only be fully squared with the monastic literary environment to which we owe their transmission by positing that her literary role of sexually symbolic mediation in tandem with the king between this world and the other, man and god, matched and foreshadowed that of Christ's bride the Church in medieval Christian ideology and allegory.

11. If, as has been argued in the preceding sections, a hierogamous pagan Irish sacral kingship and associated mythology had by about the seventh century A.D. been subtly but nonetheless comprehensively converted by churchmen into a Christian ideology of monarchy by God's grace with a marked Old Testament stamp, one might reasonably expect some influence from biblical prototypes upon the representation of great kings in Irish tradition.

A series of articles by Elizabeth Gray (1981-3) have done much to illuminate the manner in which *Cath Maige Tuired* draws on originally pagan mythical traditions to treat a wide range of social issues relevant to early medieval Ireland, the principal illustrative technique being to juxtapose positive and negative behavioural patterns. As also recognised by Ó Cathasaigh (1983b), a central contrast of this type is between Bres and Lug as bad and good paradigms respectively for accession to and stewardship of the kingship. Still more recently (McCone, 1989, 122-32) it has been suggested that contemporary clerical attitudes were fundamental to a further opposition of this type between *cáinte* or "satirist" and *fili* or "poet" (see ch. 9, 9-12) in the same text. Moreover, its monastic author may well have seen in the central conflict between the Túath(a) Dé (Danann) and Fomorians an Irish analogue of that between the Israelites and Philistines (ibid., 136-7; see ch. 3, 8).

Although Lug is undoubtedly and Bres probably a pagan Celtic deity in origin, their representation in *Cath Maige Tuired* may still owe a good deal to biblical models. Thus Bres's improper succession through his maternal kin, unkingly

conduct duly subjected to formal public condemnation, and alienation of his former supporters are quite reminiscent of Israel's abortive first experiment with kingship in the person of Abimelech (Jud. 9). On the other hand, Lug's good looks, many talents, skill on the harp, valour, judgment and ability to slay a Fomorian giant with a slingshot bear an uncanny likeness to the attributes of that slayer of the Philistine Goliath and paragon of Old Testament kingship David that is hardly all due to coincidence (ibid., 137-9).

As Ó Cathasaigh has pointed out (1977, 74-80), the tale *Esnada Tige Buchet* purports to give the moral and historical justification for the passing of the Tara kingship from the control of the Leinstermen symbolized by Cathàer Már to that of the Síl Cuinn, later Uí Néill, symbolized by Cormac mac Airt. The basic idea was that for some time the Leinstermen held Tara and the Síl Cuinn resided in nearby Kells until Cormac mac Airt became the first of their line to establish his dynasty permanently in Tara and build there, as can be seen from the following two passages. "The Cathaír Már, then, whose sons we have enumerated, fifty years to him in the kingship of Ireland, as Laidcenn affirms. The occupation of Cathaír (was) fifty years as above. Cathaír and Conn Cétchathach were contemporary, Cathaír in Tara and Conn in Kells, without battle or war between them both" (*Corp. Gen.*, 70 = 124a22-7). According to a crucial part of *Esnada Tige Buchet* mistakenly removed against all the manuscripts to an 'Appendix A' as a "clumsy interpolation" by its editor (Greene, 1955, 27), "Cormac grandson of Conn was in Kells before he took the kingship of Ireland, for Medb Lethderg did not let him into Tara after the death of his father, i.e. Medb Lethderg of the Laigin had been beside Art and she had enjoyed the kingship after the death of Art. Kells, then, was the dwelling of the kings, and it is after the taking of the kingship by Cormac that Tara was dug by him, i.e. that was the land of Odrán, i.e. a peasant of the Déssi Breg." (ibid., 31). After Odrán's voluble protests Cormac agrees satisfactory compensation with him and is amicably confirmed in possession of Tara.

Whatever dim refractions of distant actual happenings it may or may not contain, this tradition's at first sight surprising generosity to the position of earlier occupants is most readily explicable in terms of Tara's comparability with Jerusalem (ch. 2, 3) and of Cormac's status as a pre-Patrician Irish counterpart of Solomon (see Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 59-60) or David. Famed like this pair of preeminent Old Testament sovereigns for wisdom, justice and gnomic instructions (cf. ch. 2, 2), Cormac also shared with both, especially David, privileged royal access to God's truth and support (2 above and ch. 3, 10-1; cf. ch. 4, 7). Cormac was also comparable with David in that *Genemain Chormaic* depicts him as a pre-ordained king spending his youth hiding in the wilderness from his enemies. Moreover, rather like his biblical counterpart, who fled Jerusalem during Absalom's short-lived rebellion (2 Sam./Kgs. 15-8), he is represented as temporarily losing the Tara kingship for a brief spell (ch. 5, 12).

In line with these analogies Cormac's move from Kells to Tara can be plausibly put down to a deliberate evocation of David's move from Hebron to Jerusalem, which was likewise associated with building activity: "David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah. And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusite, the inhabitant of the land: which spake unto David, saying . . . 'David

shall not enter here'. Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion, the same is the city of David . . . So David dwelt in the fort and called it the city of David and built around about from Millo and inward" (2 Sam./Kgs. 5:4-9).

In both cases a vassal people was supplanted, the Canaanite Jebusites by David and the *Dési Breg* by Cormac (cf. ch. 3, 8). If Odrán's initial objection to Cormac and his followers' intrusion into Tara can be compared with that of Jerusalem's Jebusite defenders, the subsequent accommodation between the two may well have been inspired by David's friendly negotiation with Araunah the Jebusite for the purchase of his threshing floor for building purposes (2 Sam./Kgs. 24:18-25).

There can be no doubt that Cormac's role in early Christian Irish *senchus* as the perfect pre-Patrician king was inextricably linked, whether as cause, effect or a mixture of both, with his alleged worship of God and adherence to Mosaic law. Like David in the Bible itself, he was the 'Old Testament' embodiment and prefiguration of what was to become the Christian ideal of kingship by God's grace, and monastic writers' enhancement of the similarities between these two mythical paragons of sovereignty need come as no surprise.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Fire and the arts

1. It has been argued above that medieval Irish men of letters saw divine providence as operating through a series of trinitarian filters whereby the sovereignty's cosmic attributes were reconstituted in her personal ones and these then matched with her regal husband's three definitive traits, which in turn reflected the three primary social classes embodied by the king, namely hospitallers, warriors and men of art (ch. 5, 9-10). The aim of the present chapter is to show that the men of art or *áes dáno* too were classified into three further main spheres of activity correlating with those of society as a whole. This will lead to a consideration of the role of fire and cooking in descriptions of the *áes dáno* and other major social groups.

2. The Latin Life of St. Daig of Inishkeen in the Salamanca codex is unusual in displaying a striking thematic consistency that is clearly enunciated as early as the third section. During a visit by its youthful hero to the nearby monastery of Louth and its founder St. Mochtae "then the man of God ordered the holy lad to be brought to him and greatly rejoiced at his arrival. And taking his hand he said: 'this is the physician (*medicus*) concerning whom I once foresaw in the spirit that he would cure me of my three infirmities.' For Mochtae suffered from a severe ailment of head, heart and kidneys. However, by placing the boy's hand upon the sick members he was immediately cured. After this he blessed the same hand and said, 'that hand will artistically make very many utensils of iron and bronze as well as gold and silver for the use of the Church. In addition it will also write very many volumes most excellently (*plurima de ferro et aere, de auro etiam atque argento utensilia ad usum ecclesiae pertinentia artificiose manus ista operabitur. Insuper et plurima peroptime scribet volumina*)'" (Heist, 1965, 389). Throughout the rest of his life Daig's actions conform overwhelmingly to this prediction: in addition to some other cures the dead are restored to life with monotonous regularity, a long inventory of his various ecclesiastical metal artefacts is given (par. 3), and the production of such objects as well as books is mentioned from time to time. The Church's interest in and patronage of key *áes dáno* specializations are thus clearly asserted (see ch. 4, 2), as is the trichotomization of these under the major headings of healing, metalwork and learning.

Virtually the same tripartition of the arts is made quite unambiguously in the scholar-king Cormac mac Cuilennáin's ninth-century Glossary entry for Brigit: "Brigit, i.e. the poetess (*ban-file*), daughter of the Dagdae. This is Brigit the female seer or woman of insight (*ban-éces nó bé n-éicsi*), i.e. the goddess whom poets (*filid*) used to worship, for her cult was very great and very splendid. It is for this reason that they call her (the goddess) of poets (*poetarum*) by this title, and her sisters were Brigit the woman of leechcraft (*bé legis*) and Brigit the woman of smithcraft (*bé ngoibnechta*), i.e. goddesses, i.e. three daughters of the Dagdae are they. By their names the goddess Brigit was called by all the Irish" (Stokes, 1862, 8). This antiquarian passage in Old Irish interspersed with Latin gives a remarkably clear insight into the likely pagan antecedents of a major early Irish saint. Moreover, in presenting a trinity of identically named patronnesses of the arts subdivided into medicine, metalwork and the learned discipline of poetry it almost exactly replicates the scheme just identified from Daig's Life.

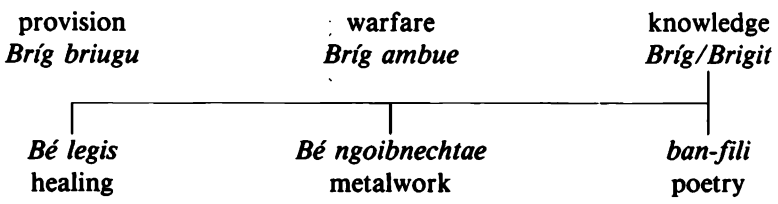
3. Apart from healing miracles, particularly the cure of lepers, that are too much of a hagiographical commonplace to prove much in isolation, the St. Brigit of hagiography displays little thematic affinity with the identically named daughters of the Dagdae as described by Cormac above. On the other hand, all of the early Brigidine Lives from Cogitosus' roughly mid-seventh-century *Vita Brigitae* on (trans. Connolly and Picard, 1987) share a rather distinctive obsession with the miraculous provision of food, drink and goods, hospitality and other acts of generosity. The obvious prototype for these would be a *briugu* or "hospitaller", and *Cethirslicht Athgabála* duly mentions the judgement of a legendary Bríg *briugu*, mother of the Ulster Cycle's peacemaker Sencha mac Ailella (*CIH* 377.26 and 380.14-5, cf. Kelly, 1988, 358).

The names Bríg and Brigit were prone to interchangeability in early Irish sources. Thus the inventory of identically named female saints, *Comanmann Náeb-úag nÉrenn*, lists ten different Brigits, twelve Brígs and three Brigits *alias* Brígs depending upon the manuscript (Ó Riain, 1985, 153-4 = no. 708.1-23), the Dagdae's daughter Brigit the poetess is called Bríg in *Cath Maige Tuired* (Gray, 1982, 119), and Bríg daughter of Comloch in the Old Irish *Bethu Brigte* (par. 31) turns up as a Brigit in the so-called *Vita I* or "First Life" in Latin (par. 27; Bollandus, 1658, 121). The Christian St. Brigit's cult or attributes may, then, be partly based upon those of the mythical female hospitaller whose name is preserved in a legal context as Bríg the *briugu*.

Another mythical Bríg mentioned in the law tracts is "Bríg *ambue*, the female expert of the men of Ireland in wisdom and prudence", as she is called in a list of pre-Christian Irish legal paragons attached to the H.3.17 version of the so-called 'pseudo-historical' prologue to the *Senchus Már* (*CIH* 1654.12). *Ambue* "stranger, outlaw" denoted someone without the property and attendant legal rights of a *bue* or full member of the *túath* such as the *bó-aire* or "cow-freeman", whose legal status is ascribed by *Críth Gablach* (pars. 13 and 24) preeminently to the ownership of cattle, the basic measurement of wealth in ancient Ireland as in many other societies (cf. Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 105-6). Etymologically *bue* and *am-bue* are from Celtic **bowyos* "posessing cows" (< IE **g*^{w}*owyos*; Gk. *-boios*, Skt. *gavyaḥ* "pertaining to cattle") and **am-bowyos* "cowless" (privative *am-* < IE **n̥-* "un-") respectively (McCone, 1986d, 11; 1987, 150, n. 15). The world of the *ambue*

bordered on that of the *fían* or association of propertyless and predominantly young, unmarried warrior-hunters on the fringes of settled society (ch. 5, 8; ch. 9, 2-3). If Bríg *ambue* did have such connections and made any contribution to the Christian Brigit's cult, this might help to explain St. Brigit's role as helper of kings in battle in sources such as her First Life (pars. 64-6) and *Cath Almaine* (par. 10).

We may thus tentatively postulate an erstwhile link between the triple Brigit *alias* Bríg of the *áes dáno* and a further pair of Brígs associated with hosptality and warfare respectively, as in the scheme below.



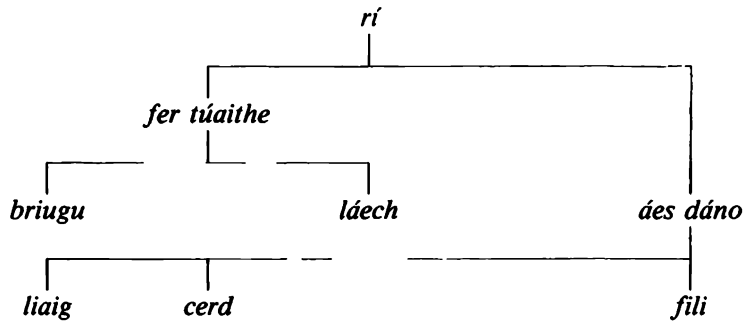
Whatever the connection or lack of it between these Brígs, Cormac's three Brigits and the various Christian saints bearing these names, notably Brigit of Kildare, there can be no doubt about the correlation of the basic threefold classification of the arts just identified in section 2 with that of the three social primes of hospitaller (*briugu*), warrior (*féindid/cathmíl/lech* etc.) and men of art (*áes dáno*) exemplified earlier. That said, some vacillation between the full-time warrior and the soldier-farmer backbone of settled society (*grád túaithe*) in this scheme needs to be kept in mind (ch. 5, 8-9).

Obviously the hospitaller and the physician (*liaig*) are both concerned in their different ways with people's physical welfare, while smiths and their ilk, to whom *cerd* could be applied as a general designation, produce the various artefacts needed by hospitallers, farmers, warriors and even craftsmen themselves. For instance, the basic landowning commoner called *mrugfer* in *Críth Gablach* is expected to possess such wooden and metal implements as large cauldrons (*caire*) with accoutrements, a vat (*dabach*) for brewing, iron vessels (*erna*), kneading troughs (*loiste[a]*), wooden mugs (*cúaid*), wash-basins, candlesticks, knives, woodworking tools, spear, ploughing outfit, milk-jugs and so on (pars. 14-5). The importance of metal cauldrons to the *briugu* will emerge below, and *Cath Maige Tuired* neatly illustrates the cooperation required between blacksmith (*gobae*), carpenter (*sáer*) and brazier (*cerd*) to produce the head, shaft and rivets respectively of spears for battle (par. 122).

Medical charms preserved in the St. Gall and Stowe Missal collections (*Thes.* II, 248-50) or the spell-binding activities of a legendary smith like Olc Aiche in *Scéla Éogain ⁊ Chormaic* show that inspired knowledge, incantatory and related skills were characteristic of the major *áes dáno* in general as compared with hospitaller, warrior or soldier-farmer. Within the professional classes themselves, however, specialization in this area belonged primarily to druid, poet, ecclesiastical scholar and the like, thus enabling them to function as an internal microcosm of the group as a whole.

The upshot of this was a basic triple classification of the *áes dáno* mirroring that of the broader society to which they belonged. In this way the scheme in chapter 5, 9

can be expanded to include a further set of three-in-one correlates as in the diagram below.



4. Daig's Life obligingly confirms the connection of his name with the Old Irish word *daig* "flame, conflagration, fire", itself the reflex of an Indo-European root *$*d^heg^{wh}$- seen in Sanskrit *dah-* "burn" etc. During the visit to Mochtae of Louth "the building in which the boy was left alone appeared to burn in a great fire (*magno ardere incendio videbatur*). But when the monks were hastening to put out the blaze, they found the building and the boy who was staying in it safe without any harm from fire. Then they return to the holy bishop and recount the most great miracle in his presence. Then Mochtae said in prophetic spirit, 'that boy shall burn greatly with the fire of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, shall not undeservedly be called Daig (*igne Spiritus Sancti puer ille multum ardebit, ideoque non immerito Daig vocabitur*)'. For this name signifies 'great flame (*magnam flammam*)' in the Irish language (*in scotica lingua*)" (par. 2).

A virtually identical fire miracle is related of the baby Brigit in section five of her First Life (Bollandus, 1658, 119) as well as at the outset of *Bethu Brigte* in its extant acephalous form. Furthermore, the twelfth-century visiting cleric Giraldus Cambrensis describes a fire cult at her main church of Kildare that can hardly be other than a pre-Christian survival and is quite reminiscent of the Vestal fire tended by a college of virgins in ancient Rome: "in Leinster's Kildare, which glorious Brigit made famous, there are many miracles worthy of record. Of these the first to come to mind is Brigit's fire, which they say is inextinguishable, not because it could not be extinguished but because nuns and holy women tend and maintain it so carefully and attentively with sufficient fuel so that it has ever remained unextinguished from the time of the virgin (Brigit) throughout the passage of so many years . . . That fire is surrounded by a circular hedge of brushwood, inside which no man enters" (*Topographia Hiberniae*, 67-9).

De Vries plausibly suggests that the Romano-Celtic Minerva is a partially syncretized native Celtic *Brigantī* named on various inscriptions and cognate with Old Irish *Brigit*, and quotes Solinus' remarks in his *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* 22, 10 about the curative thermal springs of *Aquae Sulis*, present-day Bath: "the patron godhead over these springs is Minerva's, in whose temple perpetual fires never whiten into ashes but, when the fire has dwindled, it turns into stony lumps" (1961, 78-9). It thus seems quite likely that the Bath cult and its christianized Kildare counterpart related ultimately to the same goddess, variously known as *Brigantī* "exalted one" or *Sūl* "sun" cognate with Latin *sol*, Welsh *haul* "sun", semantically

shifted Irish *súil* "eye" and so on. At all events, the pagan Brigit's association with sun and fire seems to be beyond reasonable doubt and thus constitutes a further similarity with Daig, himself probably a pagan fire god in origin.

The evidence assembled so far points to an intimate ideological connection, apparently with pagan roots, between fire and the tripartite arts of medicine, craftsmanship and learned insight. Whereas *leges* "leechcraft, medicine" was essentially unitary, the other two categories could be further subdivided, apparently triadically in the first instance. Thus the trio of mythical craftsmen mentioned in *Cath Maige Tuired* and elsewhere are Luchtae the wright (*sáer*), Goibniu the blacksmith (*gobae*) and Crédne the smith (*cerd*) of non-ferrous metals (Gray, 1982, 120 and 125-6), while classical descriptions of the pagan Gauls such as Strabo IV iv 4 trichotomize the mantic order into bard, seer and druid (Old Irish *bard, fáith* and *druí* respectively). Since, however, by the time of our earliest Irish sources the Church and other factors had caused considerable modification and expansion of these sub-sets (ch. 4, 2; ch. 9, 9-12), we may return without further ado to the basic trio of *áes dáno* callings.

5. Three significant males in St. Brigit's life each represent one of the three main categories of *áes dáno*. Firstly, Dubthach maccu Lugair, the fabled prototype of the Christian poet or *fili* (ch. 4, 3-5), is refused her hand and then helped by her to find the right bride in *Bethu Brigte* (par. 14). Secondly, her helpmeet bishop Conláed of Kildare is described as *prímcherd Brigte* or "Brigit's chief craftsman" in a gloss on *Félire Óengusso* May 3rd. (Stokes, 1905, 128). Finally, a head-ailment causes her to seek a physician, the *suid-liaig* or "master leech" Áed mac Bricc in *Bethu Brigte* (par. 29), while St. Áed's own Salamanca Life claims that "whoever is troubled by a headache is healed after calling upon the name of St. Áed (*quicumque dolore capitis vexatur, invocato nomine sancti Aidi sanatur.*) For St. Brigit, when she was struggling with a most serious headache, invoked the name of holy bishop Áed and was forthwith cured of the headache until the day of her death. As she used to say: 'invocation of St. Áed's name has cured me of most serious pains in my head'" (par. 17; Heist, 1965, 173).

Endowed by the hagiographical tradition with remarkable healing powers, St. Áed was traditional founder of the monastery of Killare, which contained buildings dedicated to St. Brigit (Gwynn and Hadcock, 1970, 392) and was situated beside the hill of Uisnech, symbolic centre of Ireland and site of an erstwhile fire ritual according to the Metrical Dindsenchus 2, 42 (Gwynn, 1906). Like Daig's, Áed's name means "fire", being frequently glossed as *tene* "fire" (see *DIL* entry) and cognate with Greek *aithós* "fiery", Sanskrit *édhaḥ* "kindling" etc. Here too, then, we may well have to do with a christianized pagan fire deity, to whom the name of the Gaulish *Aedui* and, as in the case of St. Brigit and the Dagdae's identically named daughters above, a Túatha Dé Danann doppelgänger bear witness (cf. ch. 3, 8). Indeed, a gloss on *Imacallam in dá Thúarad* or "the colloquy of the two sages" (par. 139) makes the somewhat unorthodox claim that the latter Áed and his brothers were the "three gods of Danu" who possessed "mastery of learning (*suíthe na hécsi*) fully" between them and were "the three sons of Brigit the poetess". The attributes of the Christian saint suggest that Áed's third here may have been medicine.

Section 16 of Daig's Salamanca Life mentions a sister of the saint called Lasair, one more name meaning "flame" in Old Irish that quite possibly points to yet

another christianized fire goddess with a cult sufficiently widespread to generate the diverse local saints of this name recorded in genealogies (see Ó Riain, 1985, 249). One such, based in Roscommon, is the subject of an early Modern Irish Life of Lasair that may have older roots and repeatedly stresses her association with various types of learning and verbal skill (Gwynn, 1911).

This quartet of saints with arguable origins as pagan deities connected with fire and the arts falls into two pairs comprising a closely related male and female. One member of each pair covers all three main types of *dán* "art" while the other specializes in just one, but there is inversion of the sexes in this respect. Thus in the first duo the female Brigit is omnicompetent and the male Áed is restricted to medicine, whereas in the second it is the male Daig who has a general command and the female Lasar concentrates upon learning. These detailed correlations point to an old pagan mythological schema expressing an intimate ideological connection between fire and the three main branches of the arts. This is most directly discernible in Cormac's above reference to the three goddesses named Brigit, but in the hagiography of Áed, Daig and Lasar there are significant survivals in a christianized form reflecting the Church's proprietorial interest in this vital area (ch. 4, 2).

6. The fifth-century B.C. Greek tragedian Aeschylus maintains a thematically parallel connection between fire and the arts subdivided into healing, divination and craftsmanship in his play *Prometheus Desmotes* or Prometheus Bound, which recounts Zeus's punishment of the philanthropic Titan for stealing some of the gods' fire and giving it to men. There fire is called *pántekhnon* "promoter of all the arts" (l. 7) and "teacher of every art to mortals . . . and great way to achievement" (ll. 110-1), the arts and ways involved being enumerated under the basic headings of cures for diseases, divination and sacrifice, and finally the working of bronze, iron, silver and gold (ll. 476-506).

The importance of fire in the smelting and working of metals is too obvious to require comment. Regarding the physician's use of fire to prepare medicaments, *ingert bruthchán* "heating of brews" in the Old Irish legal tract on distraint *Cethirslicht Athgabála* (*CIH* 420.32) is glossed "as long as he is boiling anything good of herbs and prescriptions for someone who is sick" (ibid., 421.10-1; *airet bes oc bruith in neich as caín do losaib ⁊ do éolusaib do neoch bís i ngalur*), while in the course of his cure of Núadu in *Cath Maige Tuired* Míach "for the third nine days kept casting white tufts of marshy rushes black after they had been blackened in fire" (par. 33; *in tres nómaid do:bidced gelscotha di boc-suibnib dubaib ó-ro:dubtis i tein*).

The intriguing Old Irish text known as "the Caldron of Poesy", edited by Breatnach (1981) and dated by him to the early eighth century A.D. (ibid., 55-6), is concerned with the respective roles of heredity and inspiration in the ability to produce poetry: "where is the foundation of poetic art (*bunadus ind airchetail*) in a man? Is it in the body or the soul (*in i curp fa i n-anmain*)? Some say it is in the soul, since the body does nothing without the soul. Others say it is in the body, since it is inherent in accordance with physical relationship, i.e. from father or grandfather, but it is truer that the foundation of poetic art and knowledge (*bunad ind airchetail ⁊ int sois*) is present in every physical person, but in every second person it does not shine forth (and) in the other it does shine forth (*acht cach la duine ní:atuídi, alailiu a(d:)tuídi*)" (par. 3). The 'three-generation' requirement for a poet has been

discussed elsewhere by Breatnach (1987, 94-8), who concludes that "only one thing then, natural ability, is required of a *bard* . . . To qualify for the status of *fili*, on the other hand, normally both ability and study are essential, the ideal consisting of having the proper family background in addition to these two qualifications. Where ability is missing, one's poetic family background is only of relevance as long as one's father lives" (ibid., 98).

The Caldron of Poesy approaches the basic issue by means of a doctrine that three separate cauldrons (*coiri*) within a man generate aptitude in the arts, including poetry and learning. Concerning the first, termed *coire goiriath*, "out of it is distributed knowledge (*soas*) to people in pure youth (*i n-óg-oítiu*)" (par. 5) and reference is made to "the fine speech which overflows from it (*bélrae mbil brúchtas úad*)" (par. 1). As to the second *coire érmai* primarily responsible for poetry, "in every second person it is upside down, i.e. in ignorant folk (*i n-áes dois*). It is on its side in the practitioners of bardic composition and verses (*i n-áes bairdne ⁊ rand*). It is upright in the champions of knowledge and poetic art (*i n-ánrothaib sofis ⁊ airchetail*). And the reason, then, why everyone does not practise at the same stage is because the *coire érmai* is upside down until sorrow or joy turns it" (par. 8). The various emotions and experiences capable of accomplishing this are then enumerated, and there follows a poem ascribed to the legendary *fili* Néde mac Adnai in which this cauldron is praised among other things for containing "a noble brew in which is brewed the foundation of all knowledge (*sóer-brud i mberbthar bunad cach sofis*)" (par. 13, ll. 85-6). This is turned by "divine joy and human joy" (par. 10; *fáilte déodae ⁊ fáilte dóendae*) into the third *coire sois* or "cauldron of knowledge", which is generated upside down and "out of it is distributed knowledge of every art besides poetic art (*soes cach dáno olchenae cenmo-thá airchetal*)" (par. 7).

From the description of the first cauldron (*goiriath*) of youthful knowledge at the beginning of the text it emerges as a provider of "knowledge and grammar, writing and metrics, which is of course a necessary prerequisite for any learned person" (Breatnach, 1981, 48). The second cauldron (*érmai*) is concerned with "the acquisition of the power to compose poetry, or being inspired, which is also indicated by the gloss *is maith in coiri a fuil in tein fesa* 'good is the cauldron in which is the "fire of knowledge" [= inspiration, see notes]'" (ibid., 49). The third cauldron of knowledge (*sois*) seems to refer to "what the highest grade of learned person had over and above the basics" (ibid., 51), in other words to the essential broader education of a top poet in adjacent disciplines. In short, this text, which not only gives due credit to the impulses provided by God (l. 2) and the religious life (ll. 40, 43) but also insists upon the indispensability of God's grace for bringing the poetic cauldron *érmai* to its final upright position (par. 12), is geared to the core monastic syllabus of overlapping branches of learning, including *filedacht*, described earlier (ch. 1, 10-1).

As Breatnach points out, "central to this text is the idea of the cauldron as the source of ability in poetry (and other skills) . . . Two aspects of the cauldron are relevant: (i) that of a cooking vessel . . ., and more important, (ii) that of a container" (ibid., 48), the three possible positions of which obviously relate to the amount of knowledge and ability it can be expected to hold: "the upright is regarded as the ideal, the upside-down as the least desirable, with the inclined position being in between. The three positions can be taken to correspond roughly to full, empty and half-full, respectively" (ibid., 50).

In the present context particular significance attaches to the culinary metaphor associated with the preparation and allocation of the cauldrons' contents, as in the passages cited above about "the noble brew in which is brewed the foundation of all knowledge" and the "fine speech" that boils over (*brúchtas*) from its vessel. The cooking of a cauldron's contents, of course, requires the application of heat from a fire, in this case arguably the *tein fesa* or "fire of knowledge" in the gloss on l. 108. In similar vein *airchetal* or "poetic art" is said to "shine forth" (par. 3) in appropriate circumstances, while one of the human joys that stir the cauldron *érmai* is "joy at the arrival of *imbas* which the nine hazels of fine mast at Segais in the *síd*-mounds amass and which is sent upstream along the surface of the Boyne, as extensive as a wether's fleece, swifter than a racehorse, in the middle of June every seventh year regularly" (par. 11).

This, of course, is a reference to that well known perquisite of the fully accomplished poet *imbus for:osnai* "great knowledge that lights up", and references to the nuts of Segais have been collected by O'Rahilly, who summarizes their import as follows: "the well of Segais was, according to one account, situated beneath the sea in Tír Tarngire (the Otherworld). Around it were hazel-trees, the fruit of which dropped into the well and caused bubbles of mystic inspiration (*na bolcca immaiss*) to form on the streams which issued from the well. Another account has it that the nuts which fell from the hazels into the well of Segais used, either once a year or once in seven years, to pass into the River Boyne; and those mortals who were fortunate enough to find the nuts and to 'drink the *imbas* out of them' obtained the seer's gift and became accomplished *filid*. According to other accounts, there were salmon in the Otherworld well, and as the wisdom-full hazel-nuts dropped into the water the salmon ate them" (1946, 322-3).

These accounts are very different from what Cormac's Glossary describes as the pagan rite of *imbus for:osnai* involving consumption of a piece of animal flesh by the *fili*, an incantation (*díchetal*) over him, an offering to idols, and a ritual trance in which the revelation is made (Stokes, 1862, 25). The unacceptability of this rite to the Church is clear from Cormac's statement that it had been banned along with the related *teinm* (verbal noun of *teinnid* "cracks, breaks") *láeda* by St. Patrick, and it has obvious affinities with two very similar literary descriptions of the *tairb-feis* or "bull-feast" in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (pars. 11-2; cf. ch. 3, 4) and *Serglige Con Culainn* (pars. 22-3). The use of imperfects in both indicates that this mantic ritual to determine a future king of Tara was regarded as a thing of the past, the latter text's slightly fuller version running as follows: "then a bull-feast is held by them that they might discover from it to whom they would give the kingship. It is thus that that bull-feast used to be held, namely a white bull was killed and one man would consume his fill of its flesh and its broth and the prayer of truth (*ór fírinde*) would be sung over him by four druids and there used to appear to him the manner of the man who would be made king there from his form and description and the manner of the action he would perform." The act of cooking as a prelude to the acquisition of knowledge by eating, merely implicit in Cormac's account of *imbus for:osnai*, is made quite explicit in these accounts of the *tairb-feis*. Moreover, their reference to broth leaves little doubt that boiling in a cauldron or the like was envisaged.

Clerical sensibilities seem to have been more in tune with the association of *imbus for:osnai* with nuts falling into a well in an otherworld readily perceived as an

allegory of the sinless Christian paradise governed by God's truth (ch. 3, 13). The centrality of this thinking to the section of *Scél na Fír Flatha* called *Echtra Cormaic i Tír Tairngiri* has already been argued (ch. 6, 10), and on arrival in the land of promise Cormac soon espies "a shining well in the enclosure, five streams (coming) out of it and the hosts in turn drinking the water of the streams. Nine everlasting hazels above the well. There the purple hazels drop their nuts into the well and the five salmon that are in the well crack them open so that their bubbles (*bolca*) are sent on the streams" (par. 36). The allegorical significance of this passage is subsequently expounded by Manannán as follows: "the well that you saw with the five streams out of it is the well of knowledge (*topur in fis*). They are the five senses (*na cúic cétfada*) through which knowledge is obtained and, moreover, no one who does not drink a draught from the well itself and from the streams shall have art (*dán*). The people of many arts (*lucht na n-ildán*), it is they who drink from them both" (par. 53).

Whether this is an allegorical interpretation of a somewhat modified pre-Christian doctrine or a further instance of the capacity of Christian allegory to generate fresh 'traditional' narrative (see ch. 3, 13), the nuts bubbling in the water can be regarded as analogous to the seething cauldron from which knowledge may be obtained according to other representations above. Moreover, the role of actual or symbolic cooking in the acquisition of knowledge is a central feature of a famous episode in the *Macgnímartha Finn* or "Boyhood deeds of Finn" where the young hero, still called Demne, sucks his thumb after burning it while cooking the long-awaited salmon of Fecc, no doubt a relation of the supernatural fish mentioned in *Echtra Cormaic* above, for the poet Finn, who then realizes that Demne is the Finn for whom the eating of the salmon is destined. "Thereupon the youth eats the salmon. It is that which gave knowledge to Finn, to wit, whenever he put his thumb into his mouth and sang through *teinm láeda*, that which he did not know would be revealed to him. He learned the three things that constitute a poet, to wit, *imbus for:osnai, teinm láeda* and *díchetal di chennaib"* (pars. 18-9 = Nagy, 1985, 214).

According to Joseph Nagy's penetrating analysis of this narrative in his pioneering book on *The wisdom of the outlaw* "cooking is apparently also an important part of the communication of imbas from its mysterious source to the poet . . . Only after it is cooked does the wisdom-bearing food become acceptable to the poetic consumer . . . The gilla, a living symbol of transition, is asked to effect the transformation of the salmon from raw to cooked, and of the knowledge it contains from wild and inaccessible to cultural and usable. The gilla is ordered to cook the fish only and not to eat any part of it. But in the process of preparing the food for the poet, the gilla becomes a cook, a consumer, and an odd sort of cooked commodity himself . . . Demne in the salmon episode of the *Boyhood Deeds* absorbs the entire cooking situation: he cooks the salmon, is burnt while cooking it, and puts his quasi-cooked finger in his mouth as if it were the food to be eaten. In the end he himself eats the cooked salmon" (ibid., 157-8).

It thus seems that poetic understanding is not only itself 'cooked' for human ingestion but also transforms its recipient by a kind of culinary process, as is implied by its very name *imbus for:osnai* "great knowledge which lights up, kindles".

7. The foregoing has focused upon evidence for a persistent connection in early Irish sources between the arts and fire allied with cooking. In the case of metalwork

and medicine the role of fire-induced smelting or cooking to transform crude natural resources into refined products fit for human use and consumption is an observable fact of life open to mythical and ideological exploitation. It then becomes easy enough to understand how this mediatory function of fire and cooking as interconnected modes of conversion from one state to another could lend itself to mythical treatments of poetic inspiration, learning and other social activities.

This nexus has been explored by Lévi-Strauss in his *Mythologiques*, the first volume of which in English translation is appropriately entitled *The raw and the cooked* and analyses various mostly southern Amerindian myths "which view culinary operations as mediatory activities between heaven and earth, life and death, nature and society" (1970, 64-5). The notion that "cooking brings about the cultural transformation of the raw" (ibid., 142) has recently been put to good use by Nagy, who neatly states the basic premise as follows: "as the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has amply demonstrated, cooking and fire in myth and ritual often represent the process of socialization. Ideologically, just as food is turned from raw and indigestible to cooked and edible by being exposed to fire, so, concurrently, it is translated from the realm of nature into the realm of culture by the civilized and civilizing act of cooking. In the language of myth and ritual symbolism, that which exists outside society or is not entirely social is designated 'raw', while that which exists within society and has an identifiable social function is designated 'cooked'" (1985, 132).

If we move beyond the *áes dáno* to the other main early Irish social categories, it is immediately apparent that the relevance of cooking is at its most literal and direct in the case of the *briugu* or "hospitaller", the owner of various kinds of livestock by the hundred for the public provision of hospitality to anyone visiting his *tech n-oíged* or "guesthouse" (ch. 5, 8). Fire was the means of cooking unfailing supplies of food for guests in the great cauldrons that were the *briugu*'s hallmark in myth and real life. Thus the law tract *Uraicecht Becc* insists that the superior *briugu leitech* or "ample hospitaller" must possess a *coire ainsicc* apparently understood as an "immovable cauldron" (*CIH* 1608.30; McCone, 1984c, 3), while the opening description of the hostel of the *ríg-briugu* or "arch-hospitaller" Mac Da Thó (ibid., 4) in *Scéla Muicce* refers to "seven hearths in it and seven cauldrons, an ox and a bacon flitch in each cauldron". A particularly significant stock motif already cited from *Esnada Tige Buchet* (ch. 5, 8) recurs as follows in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* with reference to the arch-hospitaller from whom that tale takes its name: "since he took up management of house and land (*trebad*) his cauldron has not been taken from the fire (*ní:tuccad a chairi do thenid*) but was boiling food (*no:bíd oc bruith bíd*) for the men of Ireland" (par. 133; here *LU* 7771-2).

For the hospitaller, then, cauldron and fire were an essential means of mediating between nature and society by dispensing his possessions in cooked form to his visitors and thereby securing his own social identity and status. In effect, the *briugu*'s preoccupation with *trebad* and hospitality constituted a full-time version of concerns applying in a rather less concentrated form to the *grád túaithe* or landholding class in general. It has already been seen that such status depended largely on possessions, notably livestock and utensils including a large cauldron, and the attendant obligation to give and right to receive due hospitality (3 above and ch. 5, 8). Thus culinary activity associated with fire and cauldrons was a potent overall symbol of the bonds holding society together.

As has been seen in the previous section, the culinary uses of fire were likewise essential for the *áes dáno*. The physician or *liaig* was, like the *briugu*, a straightforward cook by virtue of the herbal concoctions he brewed, while the smith or *cerd* used fire to 'cook' or convert nature's crude ores into refined metal artefacts for social use. Finally, the element of knowledge and inspiration also present in the activities of physicians and smiths is realized in its purest form by the learned poets or *filid*, and was apparently envisaged as being released in them by the consumption of magically cooked food or, in the case of the Caldron of Poesy, by the direct action of a metaphorical divine fire upon the inner man, a vessel comparable with one or more types of cauldron in which knowledge could be 'brewed'. Thus were the forces of nature and the supernatural channelled by the 'cookery' of inspiration into the supreme socio-cultural artefact of knowledge and learned composition.

8. Fire, however, can be destructive as well as constructive (cf. Lévi-Strauss, 1970, 106), a dichotomy well brought out by Aeschylus's Prometheus. Lines 351-72 of this Greek tragedy vividly describe the death and havoc unleashed by various kinds of elemental fire both during and as a result of the ferocious conflict between Zeus and Typhon, in deliberately marked contrast with the fire that Prometheus controlled by enclosure in a fennel stalk in order to benefit mankind with the arts.

The ancient Irish were equally aware of fire's destructive power and potential, particularly in martial contexts, which brings us to the third basic social category made up of warriors (ch. 5, 8-9). A typical enough instance of the destructive use of fire in warfare is provided by the Ulster hero Conall Cernach's boast in *Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó*: "I swear what my people swear that, since I took a spear into my hand, I have not been without the slaying (*guin*) of a man of Connacht every single day and slaughter by fire (*orcain fri daigid*) every single night" (par. 16). Furthermore, there is an obvious ring of elemental destruction to the well known and much discussed motif of threefold death by *guin* ⁊ *bádud* ⁊ *loscud* "wounding and drowning and burning" (Radner, 1983, with further references; cf. ch. 6, 4).

In contradistinction to the fundamentally beneficent and productive fires of the *briugaid* and *áes dáno*, the early Irish warrior's inherent fire was regarded as essentially elemental and, unless checked, liable to burst forth with dire consequences for friend or foe alike in the immediate vicinity. The famous physical distortion or *ríastrad* that accompanies the preeminent hero Cú Chulainn's outbursts of uncontrollable ferocity includes "a spark of fire on every single hair (*oíbell tened . . . for cach óenfinnu*)" and "the warrior's radiance from his crown (*in lúan láith assa mulluch*)" (*Táin*[1] 430 and 433-4). Even at the level of vocabulary *fichid* "fights" and *fichid* "boils" are homonyms, while *grís* "heat" and *bruth* "boiling heat" also mean "ardour, valour", *daig* "flame" can signify "hero" and so on (see relevant *DIL* entries).

In Cú Chulainn's final *mac-gnímrad* or "boyhood deed" in *Táin Bó Cúailnge* his martial exploits whip him up into such a state of frenzy that on returning home he demands combat with his own people but is shamed by the sight of bare-breasted women into covering his face, seized and plunged into three successive vats of water to cool him down sufficiently for readmission into settled society. The warrior's heat here is no mere metaphor: "they put him into a vat (*dabach*) of cold water. That vat bursts about him. The second vat, moreover, into which he was put, it boiled with fists therefrom (*fichis dornaib de*, presumably fist-sized bubbles). The third vat into

which he went after that, he heated it until its heat and its cold suited him. He then comes out, and thereafter the queen, Mugain, puts a blue mantle around him with a silver brooch in it and a hooded tunic. And he sits at Conchobar's knee then" (*Táin*[1] 815-20).

It has been suggested elsewhere (McCone, 1986d, 16-7; 1987, 112-4) that Cú Chulainn's martial outing and subsequent homecoming in this episode constitute a somewhat formalized and clerically bowdlerized literary reflex of the aristocratic youth's semi-bestial phase as a member of a *fían* or hunter-warrior association before his transition to full membership of propertied society was marked by an erstwhile baptismal rite similar to that represented iconically on the Gundestrup Cauldron (ch. 9, 2-3). However, in this *mac-gnímrad* the transitional immersion has been significantly endowed with marked culinary overtones. Like once raw meat being rendered fit for human consumption in a seething cauldron, Cú Chulainn has the wildness literally boiled out of him in a vat. The violent young warrior is 'cooked' into social acceptability, so to speak.

In early Irish myth and saga the warrior's ambiguity or instability as a figure capable of switching from protection to destruction is also prone to be expressed in canine terms with quite striking Greek analogues (McCone, 1984c). Just as a happy or unhappy sexual liaison with a woman of sovereignty may serve as an index of a king's good or bad rule, so too can the nature of a warrior's martial encounter with a supernatural hound prove symptomatic of his good or bad fortune and conduct. It has already been seen that the propitious combination of king and woman blesses sovereignty and society with the pervasive benefits of ruler's truth (*fír flaithemon*), whereas their separation signals the end of this prosperity and may portend the king's death (ch. 5, 5). Similarly, success in slaying the great hound in fair fight according to "men's truth" (*fír fer*) could signify the attainment of martial prowess through appropriation of its fierce attributes, whereas loss of a hound through its rabid disobedience might bring a mighty warrior down (see ch. 3, 5).

Liable, like his hound mascot, to fluctuate between controlled loyalty and unruly frenzy, an early Irish warrior like Cú Chulainn lent himself to representation as a kind of self-heating vessel that could boil over all too easily, a tendency that needed restraining in time of peace and directing properly in time of war if it was not to prove indiscriminately destructive.

It is also worth noting that fire and heat in their negative burning rather than their positive cooking aspect can serve as appropriate symbols of the 'desocializing' transitions involved in loss of status through various types of misdemeanour. The importance of *enech* "face, honour" as a component of social worth has already been alluded to, as have various disgraceful conditions that cause its loss and include being the object of a justified satire (*áer*), a false witness (*gú-fíadnaise*) or an evader of sureties according to legal tracts (ch. 5, 7). The shame engendered by such acts reddens and burns their demoted perpetrators, being designated by terms like *enech-rucce* "face-flushing, insult" (Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 85), *imdergad* "reddening, disgrace" and *grísad* "burning (by satire)" (see *DIL* entries). For instance, with regard to the heavy compensation due for an unjust satire on the honour (*enech*) of a powerful man *Bretha Nemed* cautions "do not wound it with burning (*ní-s: grísid -gona*) and do not satirise cheeks unless you get the gold of Ophir and Havilah" (*CIH* 2218.24-5), two places famed for their gold in the Old Testament (1 Chron. 29:4, 2 Chron. 8:18, Gen. 2:11-2; Breatnach, 1984, 457-8).

Like bubbles (*bolga*) rising to the surface of a heated cauldron's contents, blisters (*ferba, bolga*) are raised upon a cheek burned by the shame of satire or the like, as happened when the poet Néde lampooned Caier to force him out of the kingship (Stokes, 1862, xxxvii-viii). Indeed, Cormac's Glossary defines *ferb* "blister" as "a bubble that comes upon a person's face after satire or after false judgement (*bolc do:cuirethar for aigid duine íar n-aír nó íar ngúbreth*)" (ibid., 19). It thus transpires that the poet's fire, like that of the warrior, could destroy by burning on occasion.

9. If the mediatory or transitional imagery of fire and cookery was applicable in various analogous ways to each of the main social categories identified above and in chapter five, what of the king who embodied and presided over them all?

The significance of the equine inauguration ritual described by Giraldus Cambrensis (ch. 5, 4) in this respect has been elucidated by Nagy through a suggestive comparison with Mis's nuptials: "this symbolic system operates vividly in the medieval Irish story of Mis, a woman who goes mad after the death of her father and wanders off into the wilderness, where she runs as fast as the animals. She is finally rescued and tamed by a musician; he lures the swift female to his side with music, has sexual intercourse with her, feeds her cooked meat, and - to complete her reformation - washes her in the broth of the meat. Mis, who is being changed from virginal daughter to sexual partner, achieves this passage in the setting of the wilderness - the domain of the fénnidi, who are also involved in a passage from childhood to adulthood. The girl, to become civilized once again and an adult, must eat cooked meat and be bathed, or 'cooked', in the broth of the meat. This theme of an initiate being immersed in hot liquid in which food has been stewed also appears in Gerald of Wales' late twelfth-century description of an Irish kingship ritual. In both of these instances the initiate who is fed and treated as food is invested, as a result of this treatment, with a new social identity (that of wife in one case, king in the other)" (1985, 132-3).

The culinary ritual of the *tarb-feis* to determine a new king (see 6 above) has a similar, if less direct, implication, as does the more mundane *feis* or "feast" held in celebration of a king's accession. The account of the five brothers Lugaid in *Cóir Anmann* (par. 70; ch. 5, 4) is of especial interest in this regard by virtue of its association of an act of cooking, this time roasting rather than boiling, and eating with each of the above transitions from sexual immaturity to maturity, from youthful hunting in the wilderness to civilized life, and from candidacy for to acquisition of the kingship itself. Essentially the same constellation of elements also occurs with similar import in *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* (pars. 9-18; see ch. 8, 2). Since we shall see that kings' sons tended to pass their youth in the wild hunting and fighting company of the *fían* (ch. 9, 3 and 8; McCone, 1986d, esp. 8-10), this direct progress from wilderness to kingship is a highly significant version of the type of culinary passage into respectable society seen in Cú Chulainn's case above.

Having been told that a son of his called Lugaid would succeed him as king, Dáire Doimthech duly gave this name to all five of them. In answer to his question as to which of these would actually gain the kingship, a druid replied that a fawn would enter the assembly and that the son who caught it would be king. The fawn duly appears and the five brothers set off in pursuit of it. "Lugaid Laígde caught the fawn (*laíg*) and Lugaid Cosc broke it up (*coscrais*) so that it is thence that (the name) Lugaid Cosc stuck to him. Lugaid Laíg-fes performs its roasting (*im⟨f⟩uine*), i.e. a

feast (*feis*) for them of it, so that it is thence that (the name) Lugaid Laígfes was granted him. Lugaid Orede goes for water with a pitcher (*cilorn*) so that it is thence he is called Lugaid Orc (cf. Lat. *orca* "a large-bellied vessel"). Everything that was roasted (*no:fuinte*) of it, Lugaid Laígde would eat it. Every leaving that he would put from him, Lugaid Corb would consume it so that it is thence that Corb stuck to him, i.e. he was defiled (*coirbthi*) from it. Lugaid Cál slept (*cotlais*) so that it is thence he took his name (*cál*, a rare word glossed "sleep" – see *DIL*). Thereafter they go hunting in the wilderness". The quest for shelter after a snowstorm brings Lugaid Corb to a lavishly appointed house inhabited by a hideous hag whom he spurns when asked to share her bed. Later, however, Lugaid Laígde arrives and agrees to sleep with her, whereupon she is transformed into a beautiful maiden and reveals herself as the sovereignty (*flaithius*). A feast is then given to all of the brothers.

Food and its digestion also serve to mark the transition from paganism and Christianity in the essentially similar cases of Eithne in *Altram Tige dá Medar* (ch. 6, 6) and Brigit in her First Life (ch. 8, 2), where both become incapable of holding down the food given them by Túatha Dé Danann and a druid respectively and then live on a pure diet of the milk of special white cows, milked by Eithne herself in *Altram Tige* and by a Christian virgin in Brigit's Life, as a prelude to entering Christian society. Indeed, given the pagan connotations and excomunicate status of *fían*-members in early Christian Ireland (e.g. McCone, 1989, 127-8; ch. 9, 8-9), their baptismal immersion and, particularly in the case of successors to the kingship, consumption of food and drink as tokens of admission to settled society may well have been invested with some Christian significance despite palpable pagan roots.

Be that as it may, it appears that the king is not only initiated into his new supreme status by being made the object and/or recipient of cooking but also himself then becomes a cooking vessel channeling nature's bounty into and harmoniously combining the various ingredients of the whole society over which he rules. This idea is beautifully expressed by a passage from *Bretha Nemed* that has been brought to my attention by Liam Breatnach and could almost have been written by an early medieval Irish adherent of Lévi-Strauss: *cach duine dligthech do:garar uile a flathemain fír fo bíth as n-é coire con:berba cach n-uile n-om* "(it is) every lawful person that is called from a true ruler because he is a cauldron that cooks together every raw thing" (*CIH* 2215.40-2216.2).

10. The ubiquity of fire's essential role, constructive or destructive as the case might be, in transitional processes crucial for mankind has ensured its extensive literal or metaphorical exploitation in many systems of religious belief. These broad considerations combine with the specific evidence concerning Brigit and Áed, Daig and Lasair (2-5 above) to make it virtually certain that pagan Celtic and Irish mythology were no exceptions to this general tendency. It thus seems quite probable that originally pagan notions underly the use of cooking or burning by fire as symbols to express a whole batch of major social processes and functions in a wide variety of early Christian Irish sources ranging from law tracts to sagas and saints' Lives.

That said, however, the inventory of religions prone to fire imagery most certainly includes Judaism and Christianity, the sacred scriptures of which abound in highly charged references to fire and its effects. In the Bible fire is above all a divine

attribute, typically functioning as a manifestation of God's power to punish or assist men. Indeed, it is a classic instrument of mediation between the chosen people and a God gratified by proper burnt offerings from those obedient to him, and himself "like a (s)melting fire" (Mal. 3:2, *quasi ignis conflans*) capable of burning up those that offend him: "and, behold, there came a fire out from the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat (*et ecce egressus ignis a Domino devoravit holocaustum et adipes qui erant super altare*); which when the hosts saw, they praised the Lord and fell upon their faces. And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took censers and put fire therein and incense thereon, and offered strange fire (*ignem alienum*) before the Lord, which had not been commanded them. And there went out fire from the Lord and consumed them (*egressusque ignis a Domino devoravit eos*), and they died before the Lord" (Lev. 9:24-10:2).

There are, of course, plentiful biblical occurrences of fire as an agent of God's wrath, which "rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" (Gen. 19:24, cf. Luke 17:29), was repeatedly warned against by the prophets (e.g Isaiah 47:14, 66:15, Jer. 21:12), was reserved for unbelieving sinners liable "to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire" (Mk. 9:42) and so on. However, fire also has a positive side in Holy Writ as the source or accompaniment of divine revelation and guidance, as when God's angel appears and God himself speaks to the exiled Moses from the burning bush, promising the Israelites' deliverance (Ex. 3:3ff.), or God "went before them to show them the way in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night" (ibid. 13:21). Jeremiah's attempts to resist the 'cookery' of divine inspiration by God's word (*sermo Domini*, 20:8) came to nought because "it became in mine heart as a fire boiling up and shut up in my bones" (20:9, *et factus est in corde meo quasi ignis exaestuans claususque in ossibus meis*). One of the seraphim actually placed an obviously hot stone taken with tongs from the Lord's altar (6:6, *calculus quem forcipe tulerat de altari*) upon Isaiah's mouth to purify him for prophecy, and Ezekiel's apocalyptic visions were introduced by a whirlwind, a great cloud, a fire and a brightness (1:4).

Most importantly of all, however, the Church itself had been brought into existence by the effects of the inspiring fire of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles: "and when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them (*et apparuerunt illis dispertitae linguae tamquam ignis seditque supra singulos*). And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4). It was presumably the Holy Spirit's quasi-culinary potential to ignite men into good and committed believers combined with the pervasive light and fire imagery in St. John's Gospel (e.g. 1:9, Christ as *lux vera quae inluminat omnem hominem venientem in mundum* "the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world") that led the eighth-century author of the Old Irish *Críth Gablach* to designate Christianity the "faith that kindles (*crettem ad:annai*)" (ll. 523-4), a concept quite compatible with the various probably native fire symbols discussed in previous sections.

Although the miraculous exposure of the babes Daig and Brigit to fire without being harmed may be rooted in the properties of these saints' arguable divine pagan precursors (see 4 above), they obviously constitute very apt portents of the saints'

future greatness in view of biblical parallels such as the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles or the preservation of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace so that "the fire had had no power on their bodies (*nihil potestatis habuisset ignis in corporibus eorum*), nor had a hair of their head been singed, neither were their coats changed, nor had the smell of the fire passed through them" (Dan. 3:27/94). Indeed, in both cases the appearance of fire is explicitly seen as a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence. Mochtae's prediction that Daig would "burn greatly with the Holy Spirit" has aleady been cited (4 above), and this time the array of fire miracles surrounding Brigit's birth in her First Life may be given in full.

Before she was born "there came a certain holy guest, praying to God through the night, and he frequently saw in the night a ball of fire in the place where the bondmaid was sleeping" (par. 3). After the happy event "one day, however, that bondmaid went to milk cows a long way off and left her daughter sleeping alone in the house. Then that house appeared to have caught fire and they all ran to put out the fire. And when they had drawn near to the house, the fire was not visible and they saw the girl happy in the house with beautiful countenance and ruddy cheeks. And they all said, 'this girl is full of the Holy Spirit (*haec puella plena est spiritu sancto*)'. One day, moreover, the druid and bondmaid and others sat in a certain place and suddenly they saw the cloth touching the girl's head burn with the fire of a flame (*subito viderunt pannum contingentem caput puellae flammae incendio ardere*), and when they stretched out their hands suddenly, they did not see the fire (*ignem non viderunt*)" (par. 5). Finally, "one night this druid (*hic magus*) was keeping watch as was his custom and beholding the stars of heaven, and throughout the whole night he saw a blazing column of fire rising from the little house in which the bondmaid was sleeping along with her daughter" (par. 6). This igneous emission of inner spiritual power is reminiscent of the *lúan láith* bursting from the crown of a furious warrior like Cú Chulainn (see 8 above), while at the same time inviting comparison with a notable fiery sign of superhuman greatness in the Bible, namely the star betokening Christ's birth and seen by the Magi (Matth. 2:1-12).

After seeking blessing and inspiration from Christ, who is addressed as "king of the bright sun" (l. 4, *a rí gréine gile*) and "bright sun that lights up heaven with much holiness" (ll. 5-6, *a gel-grían for:osnai/ riched co méit noíbe*), the author of *Félire Óengusso* proceeds to the stirring central contrast of his prologue between the fate of the saints, tortured in obscurity on earth but recipients of fame and heavenly bliss after death, with that of their proud and prosperous persecutors, long forgotten and rotting in hell. Fire plays a prominent role in this sustained series of images illustrating the triumph of once weak Christianity and the rout of the once powerful heathen. The Christian martyrs' passage to heaven could be accomplished by a rather gruesome culinary process whereby "they have been burnt over fires" (l. 39, *ro:loiscthea úas tentib*) or "were scourged, a hard course, through the furnaces of fire" (ll. 43-4, *sroiglithea, séol calad/ trésna surnu tened*), but now "the great kings of the pagans wail perpetually in burning (*mór-ríg inna ngente/ bith-golait i lloscud*), the hosts of Jesus without fall are joyful after triumph" (ll. 61-4).

Patrick Ford has recently drawn attention to the mythological significance of fire in Muirchú's late seventh-century Life of Patrick, arguing "that the tensions arising from the confrontation between the old and new religions came to be expressed (and subsequently resolved) through these symbols" (1983, 29). Thus Patrick's imminent destruction of paganism is foreshadowed quite early in this work when his obdurate

erstwhile master Miliucc immolates himself and his possessions in a great conflagration rather than accept Patrick's offer of salvation (I 11-2; Bieler, 1979, 76-81).

The centrepiece of the Life is Patrick's ultimately successful struggle to convert the stubborn king of Tara Lóegaire along with his heathen court, a conflict deliberately echoing the Old Testament episode of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and the fiery furnace (ch. 2, 3) that is symbolically ushered in when the saint lights his paschal fire on the hill of Slane in defiance of a pagan custom that no fire should be lit on that night until one had been kindled in Tara, "the head of all paganism and idolatry" (I 13, 2, ⟨*caput*⟩ *omnis gentilitatis et idolatriae*). Lóegaire's druids duly warn that "unless this fire, which we see and which has been lit before one could be kindled in your house, is extinguished on this same night that it has been lit, it will never be extinguished forever. Moreover, it will also surpass all of the fires of our custom, and he who has kindled it and the kingdom reaching us through him by whom it was kindled will on this night overcome us all and will seduce you and all the men of your kingdom. And all kingdoms will fall to him and it will fill everything and will reign for all eternity" (I 15, 5-6). Needless to say, Lóegaire and his cohorts fail to put out the fire destined to 'cook' Ireland into a Christian country, a further significant culinary symbol being the bronze cauldron (*aeneus*) bestowed upon Patrick along with the land for his church of Armagh (I 24).

The ordeal in which Patrick's disciple Benignus is unharmed by fire whereas Lóegaire's druid is consumed (I 20, 9-15) draws on the episode of the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:22-7) as well as Elijah's contest with the priests of Baal (see ch. 2, 3). In each case so far "the acts are highly symbolic, the symbolism recreating the triumph of the new faith over the old - Patrick's fire (of Christianity) over the pagan cult fire" (Ford, 1983, 32).

On his way to Armagh to die, Patrick was spoken to by an angel from a burning bush that was not consumed, "as had previously happened to Moses (*sicut antea Moysi provenerat*)". However, whereas God's message to Moses was to leave his father-in-law and return to Egypt to deliver his own people, the angel orders Patrick to turn back from Armagh and accept death in Saul (II 4). As in the Moses story, fire here marks a major transition for the hero, this time from Armagh to Saul and life to death. Fire is associated with Patrick even after death. When a church was being built over his grave, the excavators "saw a fire burst forth from the tomb and retreating feared the flame-bearing fire of the flame" (II 12, *ignem a sepulchro erumpere viderunt et recedentes flammigerum timuerunt flammae ignem*).

Mention has already been made of the caustic effects of poetic satire (8 above), but the legal tract *Míadslechta* actually uses an apposite Latin quotation from the Bible to liken a poet's praise to proving in a smith's fire: "question, is the fief (*taurchreic*) of praise or satire ordained? If it be according to the entitlement of the people of God, only the praise of God is ordained and heaven is its reward. If it be according to the entitlement of the people of the world, however, it is ordained as Solomon (said): "as silver is proved in the melting pot and gold in the furnace, so is a man (proved) by a praiser's mouth (*quomodo conprobatur argentum in conflatona ⁊ in fornace aurum, sic homo ore laudantis*" (*CIH* 587.21-4, cf. Prov. 27:21).

There was, then, no reason why monastic authors should feel discomfort with much of the fire symbolism probably inherited from pre-Christian times, since the Bible itself made extensive use of such images and concepts to express God's power

to blight or bless men. Themselves adroit cooks of suitable native and ecclesiastical ingredients into a literary and ideological brew infused with Christianity, medieval Irish *literati* seem to have had no qualms about exploiting or combining similar native and biblical mythological concepts of fire's role in order to convey syncretistic textual messages to God-fearing contemporaries.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Heroes and saints

1. As scholars have long recognised, there are undeniable thematic and compositional affinities between medieval Irish sagas and saints' Lives. Although the two-way direction of this interaction has been duly acknowledged, the greater emphasis has usually been placed upon the influence of the native heroic upon the imported hagiographic genre.

Charles Plummer supported a statement along these lines with pertinent examples: "and just as Cuchulainn was made to prophesy of Christ, so Finn prophesies of various saints. In other ways, too, saints are brought into secular stories, sometimes with a fine contempt for chronology and morality. But if in these and other ways the ecclesiastics modified the secular literature, which they largely helped to preserve, much greater was the influence of the secular story upon the ecclesiastical legends. This influence may take the form either of direct importation, or of conscious imitation, or of unconscious permeation" (1910, I, cxxxii). Felim Ó Briain's brief article on "Saga themes in Irish hagiography" (1947) has a similar import, as does Jean-Michel Picard's recent detailed investigation of an episode in Adomnán's seventh-century Life of Columba (1989), and Binchy has gone so far as to claim that the saintly stories "were, after all, nothing more than the old heroic tales transposed in a Christian or quasi-Christian key. Indeed, as the French scholar Czarnowski has pointed out, this type of Christianised saga was best calculated to appeal to a seventh-century Irish audience . . . Without accepting the author's extreme thesis that the Patrick legend is the creation of the professional poets (*filid*), one can readily agree with him that the Irish *Heiligensage* is the direct descendant of the Irish *Heldensage*" (1962b, 57-8).

As a number of cases to be discussed below suggest, there is something to be said for this approach, particularly as applied to saints' Lives apparently composed after the seventh century. After all, this would be a manifestation of what Plummer calls "a process which may be noted wherever we can trace to any extent the history of the introduction of Christianity among heathen people; the incorporation, namely, into the structure of the newer creed of fragments of materials - 'stones not of this building' - taken from the old" (1910, I, cxxix). Indeed, the appropriation of pagan materials, with such adaptations as were deemed necessary or desirable, to the Church's purpose was not only quite in keeping with early medieval missionary

strategy, to judge from the sixth-century Pope Gregory the Great's advice to Augustine of Canterbury as reported by Bede (*Historia Ecclesiastica* I 30), but has also been seen in previous chapters to be a pervasive feature of early Christian Ireland's so-called 'secular' literature. As far as her hagiographers were concerned, Picard opines with some justice that "reducing the cosmogonic content of ancient Indo-European myths to their 'historical' meaning and transferring the supernatural element to the person of the saint are two complementary techniques designed to obliterate older beliefs and replace them by the new christian faith" so that "in transmitting older myths as anecdotes or isolated legends within the context of a christian system of faith, they contributed to the breaking up of an integrated system of pagan beliefs" (1989, 373).

On the other hand, it must also be borne in mind that Irish hagiographical composition in Latin can be traced back with complete certainty at least as far as the middle of the seventh century, whereas there is no good reason to suppose that the writing of sagas in Old Irish began on any scale before the eighth (cf. Thurneysen, 1921, 14-6). While this consideration will hardly deter those inclined to place monastic literacy in thrall to a secular oral tradition from very early on, the monks' initial concentration upon saintly rather than secular heroic narrative surely points to an appreciable degree of independence coupled with the likelihood that they drew upon familiar continental hagiographical models as well as "the miracles of the canonical and apocryphal scriptures" (Plummer, 1910, I, cxxxiii). Despite Plummer's hesitation, the latter were surely the ultimate catalyst for "stories of raising the dead, turning water into wine, walking on the water, multiplying food, miraculous power of speaking languages, and so forth" (ibid.) in the Lives. Since, moreover, "one very obvious way of expanding the life of a saint was to incorporate incidents relating to that saint from the lives of other saints" (ibid., xci), hagiographical writing readily acquired its own momentum and proved quite capable of influencing 'secular' saga, as convincingly argued by Carney (1955, 35-48) on the basis of strikingly similar motifs shared by the vernacular sagas *Táin Bó Fraích* and *Aided Fergusa* with the seventh-century Latin Lives of Brigit and Columba by Cogitosus and Adomnán respectively.

Regarding the structure of those Irish saints' Lives confidently dated to the seventh century, the 'continental' stamp of Sulpicius' Life of Martin upon Cogitosus's Life of Brigit and Adomnán's Life of Columba has recently been contrasted with the 'native' orientation of politically motivated narrative itineraries typified by Tírechán's work on Patrick and the older lives of Brigit by Ultán and Ailerán embedded in her eighth-century First Life (McCone, 1984b, 29-32 and 34-6). The final Life in this group could then be said to combine and develop these two strands: "drawing as it does upon the resources of continental-style hagiography and native saga to produce what is, despite some rough edges, a thoroughly well constructed narrative, Muirchú's account of Patrick seems to have become something of a trend-setter in Irish hagiographic composition" (ibid., 34). The corollary was that "the earliest Irish saints' Lives are all in Latin and owe much to continental models, but were subjected from an early period to increasing influence from secular tradition, particularly as regards a preoccupation with political status and connections that was usually expressed in geographical and genealogical terms, the adoption of various themes and ultimately of a certain narrative style" (ibid., 38).

This 'semi-nativist' stance requires some modification in the light of Picard's still

more positive evaluation of the role of literary continental sources: "by the mid-seventh century, hagiography was a well-established genre, with its *topoi*, rules and conventions and the Irish monks had access to the best models available in Europe at the time. Monastic libraries contained works such as Athanasius's *Vita Antonii* in the Latin translation by Evagrius, some of the Lives written by Jerome, Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini*, the *Acta Silvestri*, Constantinus's *Vita Germani* and the more recent *Vita Benedicti*, written by Gregory the Great in his *Dialogi*. Modern scholarship has shown that these works were used in Ireland and many themes and motifs of Irish saints' Lives are borrowed from them" (1985, 69). Furthermore, "under the disguise of *constantia*, an important monastic virtue, the static element of the saint's character also appears in Sulpicius's *Vita Martini*. In seventh-century Irish hagiography, this feature dominates not only the *Vita Columbae* but also Cogitosus's *Vita Brigitae*. This conception of biography will survive in some of the later *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae*. One then understands why both authors did not hesitate to present their saint's life *praepostero ordine*. What has been seen as a failure in the structure of these works in fact reflects a deliberate attitude of the writers towards biography. They conceived their *vitae* as accounts of significant events through which the special nature of the saint was revealed and not as a chronological story of his or her life. Moreover, this presentation happened to correspond to the character of the hero in Celtic mythology. By retaining this feature of classical and early christian biography, Cogitosus and Adomnán were able to combine their native tradition with that of Latin letters" (ibid., 79).

Leaving questionable assumptions about the nature of the pagan Celtic hero to one side for the time being, we may turn to Picard's important identification of likely continental models for the allegedly native itinerary approach referred to above. "While the *Vita Martini* represents the main influence in early Irish hagiography, another trend was also in vogue. Its structure was akin to that of an *itinerarium* in which the life of the holy man - itself a journey in this world - is presented against a background of travels. The pattern was traditional among hagiographers. It was successfully used by Philostratus in his *Life of Apollonios of Tyrana*, and Jerome had made it famous in Latin hagiography with the *Vita Hilarionis* written in 391. This work was known in Ireland in the seventh century for Adomnán quotes from it in the *Vita Columbae*" (ibid., 80). This pattern of composition too, then, was probably based upon foreign originals, although it was of necessity swiftly adapted to the early Irish political environment in which it was expected to function.

The various patterns of borrowing and influence arguably responsible for the rather complex and elusive historical relationship between saga and hagiography will be largely ignored below in favour of an attempt to clarify the contemporaneous implications of some demonstrable convergences in our early Irish sources' representation of heroes and saints.

2. In the 1870s J.G. von Hahn identified what he termed an "Aryan expulsion and return formula" in the lives of famous heroes like Perseus, Heracles, Oedipus and Theseus from ancient Greece, the Roman Romulus and Remus, the German Siegfried and Wolfdietrich, Cyrus of Persia and India's Karna and Krishna. The scheme he elaborated was soon applied with slight amplification to Celtic material by Alfred Nutt (1881; see Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 2-4), whose treatment included the

Irish characters Fionn, Cú Chulainn, Labraid Máen and Conall. A major advance came in 1914 when, as Ó Cathasaigh puts it, "some forty years after von Hahn, the psychoanalyst Otto Rank produced a study of the pattern based on fifteen biographies, including those of Moses and Jesus Christ. Rank's use of biographies from outside the 'Indo-European' area was important, and von Hahn's belief that the pattern is exclusively 'Aryan' cannot be sustained" (ibid., 4). Lord Raglan continued this process by adding Javan and Nilotic heroes as well as the Old Testament's Joseph and Elijah to his Greek, Norse and British examples (1934; 1936, 144ff.), and de Vries too based his version of the pattern on a number of different traditions, including Celtic (1963, 211ff.; see Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 6-7). The Rees brothers have set up a paradigm for the hero's conception and birth in Celtic material and duly note that "stories of the coming of saints into the world (as recorded in the Lives of the Saints) have a great deal in common with those of the 'secular' heroes" (1961, 223-4). Finally, Ó Cathasaigh (loc. cit.) has used de Vries's model as the framework for a detailed examination of the heroic biography of Cormac mac Airt.

The medieval Irish vernacular saga *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* will serve here with the help of italics to give some idea of the kind of features commonly held to be significant in accounts of the birth and youth of a hero, in this case Níall Noígíallach, the eponymous ancestor of the Uí Néill and mythical founder of their monopoly over the Tara kingship in the historical period.

To begin with, Níall is *begotten out of wedlock* by his *royal father*, king Echu Muigmedón of Tara, upon a *lowly mother*, the slavewoman Cairenn, who is nevertheless a *foreign princess*. His *life is threatened* by the king's jealous wife Mongfind, who forces Cairenn to do hard labour "that the child might die in her womb" (par. 1) and thus causes Níall to be born and *left exposed* on the green (*faithche*) outside Tara, where he is attacked by birds. However, he is *rescued and reared by a stranger*, the poet (*éices*) Torna, who delivers a *prophecy of the child's future greatness* (pars. 2-4). After this *exile*, Níall *returns home* to Tara with Torna when ready to become king, and *elevates his mother to her proper royal status* (par. 4). Mongfind tries to thwart Níall's chances of succeeding to the kingship over her own sons by means of *various tests* (par. 5). Níall duly *succeeds* in these, *surpassing his rival elder brothers*: he earns a druidic sanction by bringing an anvil out of a burning smithy in contrast with the various lesser implements picked up by his brothers (par. 6-7), with Torna's help avoids a plan of Mongfind's to kill him (par. 8), receives the best weapons for the hunt (par. 9), and finally goes astray with his brothers in the wilderness but, when they encounter a hideous hag after kindling a fire to cook their quarry for eating, is the only one prepared to sleep with her. Thereupon she becomes a beautiful maiden and reveals herself as the sovereignty thus granted to him and his successors henceforth (pars. 9-17; cf. ch. 5, 3 and 11, ch. 7, 9). After a *triumphant homecoming* the right of Níall and his descendants to succeed his father ahead of his brothers and theirs is acknowledged and eventually implemented (pars. 18-9).

The close relationship between the secular and the saintly heroic biography is well illustrated by the opening sections of St. Brigit's Latin First Life (Bollandus, 1658, 118-20), in which these and more or less equivalent motifs are organised into an essentially analogous structure of expulsion and return, due allowance being made for the central figure's being a saintly heroine rather than a kingly hero.

Brigit's mother, the beautiful slave Broicsech, was impregnated by her concu-

piscent master, "a certain Leinster nobleman named Dubthach", much to the annoyance of the latter's lawful wife, who sought to persuade him to sell her "lest her offspring surpass my offspring" (par. 1). One day, when Dubthach and his pregnant slave were travelling in a chariot, the noise caused a druid to prophesy that "the seed of your wife will serve the seed of your slavewoman to the end of time". In response to this Dubthach thanked God "because hitherto I have had no daughter but only sons" (par. 2). Although the visiting bishops Mel and Melchú couple a prophecy that "the offspring of your bondwoman will surpass you and your seed" with the advice that she should "nevertheless love that bondwoman like your own sons because her progeny will greatly benefit your seed", his wife's unabated jealousy and fury finally force Dubthach to sell his slave to a visiting poet, while retaining his claim on the child she is expecting. The poet then leaves for his own territory, taking Broicsech and the nascent Brigit with him (par. 3). He in turn sells them to a druid from the North as a prelude to Brigit's birth (par. 4), the remarkable account of which will be given in full below, and various accompanying fire miracles that have already been described (ch. 7, 10). The druid migrates with Broicsech and her daughter to Connacht, but they are forced to move to Munster through local anger at little Brigit's prediction that the territory will be hers, "which was later fulfilled, for Brigit's *paruchia* is great today in those regions" (pars. 5-7).

There follows an episode containing virtually the same motif as that portending Eithne's transition from a pagan to a Christian environment in the much later vernacular text *Altram Tige dá Medar* (ch. 6, 6): "the holy maiden was nauseated by the druid's food and used to vomit daily. Considering these matters, the druid examined the cause of the sickness, discovered it and said: 'I am unclean, but that girl is full of the Holy Spirit. However, she does not take my food'. Then he picked out a white cow and destined it for the girl. And a certain Christian woman, a most religious virgin, used to milk that cow, and the girl used to drink the milk of that cow, without vomiting since her stomach was healthy. And that Christian woman reared the girl" (par. 8). In due course the druid sent for Brigit's father, who finally brought her peregrinatory banishment to an end by returning home with her (par. 9). Subsequently Brigit raises her slave mother to freedom in return for a miracle and escorts her home to Dubthach (par. 13). After performing various miracles and spurning matrimony, Brigit finally becomes a holy virgin in God's service by taking the veil (par. 16).

As regards date, mention of the Uí Néill king of Tara Máelsechlainn mac Domnaill (reigned 980-1002 and 1014-22) and the Munster interloper Brían Bórama (1002-14) in sections 19 and 16 respectively of *Echtra mac nEchach* proves that the text in its extant form is no older than the early eleventh century.

Conversely, the lack of reference to later kings suggests that it was hardly compiled much later than this either, a hypothesis eminently compatible with its firmly Middle Irish language. This, however, would not preclude the possibility that the central story about Níall's acquisition of the kingship had been reworked from a rather older original, as perhaps indicated by a reasonable smattering of good Old Irish forms in the text. Be that as it may, the First Life of Brigit can be fairly securely dated to the mid-eighth century and its first 41 sections shown to be drawing heavily upon Ailerán's lost mid-seventh-century Latin Life on the basis of close similarities with the independent ninth-century Old Irish and late eighth-century metrical Lives (McCone, 1982, 114-24 and 132-6; 1984b, 40-6). The composition of Brigit's heroic

biography in Latin can, then, with some confidence be traced back in its essentials to around the middle of the seventh century. At such an early date, the native patterns that would seem to have contributed substantially to this narrative are likely to have been adapted from an oral rather than a written milieu, the corollary being that the earliest literary model for a typical Irish heroic biography was provided by a saint's Life in Latin.

3. Even when confined to two narratives such as the foregoing, essentially taxonomic comparison of the type adopted by von Hahn and others is confronted by obvious differences as well as striking similarities, and classificatory difficulties inevitably increase with the amount of relevant material brought into play. Consequently a major "problem posed by the heroic biography is one of methodology. Everyone who has investigated the matter has produced a formulation differing in some measure from the others" (Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 6). A maximally comprehensive classification of the constituent elements of heroic biography worldwide would presumably need to proceed in quasi-Linnaean fashion from very general major groupings down through increasingly detailed subdivisions. At present the nearest approach to this probably unattainable ideal is de Vries's system, the superiority of which to its rivals was apparent to Ó Cathasaigh (loc. cit.).

Thus conceived, the heroic biography would amount to a particular application of the motif-index approach to folklore and literature enshrined in Stith Thompson's monumental classificatory work (1932-6). Indeed, this overall scheme has been applied by Tom Peete Cross to early Irish literature, including hagiography, in an index which "follows Professor Thompson's method of classification and enumeration, numbers not occurring in Professor Thompson's work being marked with an asterisk . . . This index is intended primarily for the use of students of folklore, custom and of comparative literature. To this end, the references to early Irish or Hiberno-Latin sources are frequently supplemented by references to modern scholarly works in which motifs found in Celtic are cited for purposes of comparative study in various fields of literary or cultural history . . . To insure as wide usefulness as possible, preference is given to translations contained in books of relatively easy accessibility" (1952, preface).

It is easy enough to find Thompson/Cross labels for many features of *Echtra mac nEchach*, for example, as the following selection shows: T121 Unequal marriage [T121.6 *Man weds his bondmaid]; Q482.1 Princess serves as menial [Q482.1.1 *Second wife (slave) must serve as menial]; L10 Victorious younger son; H1242 Youngest brother alone succeeds on quest; H1574.3 King chosen by test [H1574.3.1 *The burning forge (smithy). He who salvages anvil will be king]; D732 Loathly lady. Man disenchants loathsome woman by embracing her; N771 King (prince) lost on hunt has adventures; M310.1 *Prophecy: future greatness and fame [M310.1 *Prophecy: preeminence of man's descendants]; M301 Prophets [M301.18 *Poet as prophet, M301.19 *Smith as prophet]; R131 Exposed or abandoned child rescued.

Were some such neat and nearly exhaustive classification of a reasonably typical heroic biography's key elements feasible, it ought then to be possible to extrapolate and list those applying to any given version of the fundamental pattern, whether occurring in early Irish texts, in some other oral or literary tradition such as the Bible, or even in modern comics or films about Superman and his ilk. The sum and arrangement of these would then constitute a taxonomic dossier on the individual

narrative or the narrative complex in question as the end result of a process analogous to that applied by Propp to his various 'functions' and 'moves' in order to determine the basic morphology of certain types of folktale (see ch. 3, 4).

However, like any other taxonomy, a maximally precise formal classification of the heroic biography's essential or optional features and their various attested combinations may be an invaluable analytical aid but cannot constitute an interpretation or explanation in its own right. In effect, it can help in recognising what the differences and similarities are but not what they are for. Moreover, insofar as it attempts to reduce a large number of surface variants to a basic prototype, it invites criticisms similar to those levelled by Lévi-Strauss against Propp's method (see ch. 3, 4) by virtue of failing to offer a mechanism for integrating the countless actual variants with the underlying pattern;or patterns abstracted from them.

4. According to Rees and Rees, "whereas the pattern of the hero's life has little in common with what is historically significant in the lives of men, it does, as Lord Raglan has shown, correspond with the ritual life-cycle. In human societies generally, the times when each person becomes the central figure in a ritual are those of his birth and baptism, initiation and marriage, death and burial. The myth has a bearing upon the meaning of these rites" (1961, 213). After quoting the first part of this essentially functionalist explanation (see ch. 3, 3), Ó Cathasaigh agrees that "it seems true that the heroic biography is concerned essentially with life-crises, and there is much to be said for the view that the episodes in the heroic biography are the mythic correlatives of the rites of passage (border experiences) identified by van Gennep in his classic work" (1977, 22).

With regard to the various rituals or 'rites of passage' that were his immediate concern Arnold van Gennep explained the symbolic potency of 'liminality' as follows: "the door is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and sacred worlds in the case of a temple. Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world. It is thus an important act in marriage, adoption, ordination and funeral ceremonies . . . It will be noted that the rites carried out on the threshold itself are transition rites. "Purifications" (washing, cleansing etc.) constitute rites of separation from previous surroundings; there follow rites of incorporation (presentation of salt, a shared meal, etc.). The rites of the threshold are therefore not "union" ceremonies, properly speaking, but rites of preparation for union, themselves preceded by rites of preparation for the transitional stage. Consequently, I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *postliminal rites*" (1960, 20-1).

In an essay about aspects of Christ's mission entitled "Fishing for men on the edge of the wilderness" these three van Gennep phases have been summarised as follows by Sir Edmund Leach : "1. The initiate is separated from his or her original status in real world society (rite of separation). 2. The initiate is isolated from society in a state of limbo associated with taboos of various kinds (marginal state). 3. The initiate is brought back into real world society in his or her new (initiated) status (rite of aggregation)" (Alter and Kermode, 1987, 584). Leach then proceeds to analyse Moses' early career in these terms: "First sequence: 1a. Moses is born as a Hebrew Levite of lowly status (Exod. 2:1). b. During a massacre of male Israelite children

Moses is placed in an ark of bulrushes (sacrifice and rite of separation involving symbolic death [pictures of Moses' ark often show a kind of coffin]). 2. The ark floats in the river (marginal state). 3. Moses is discovered and lifted from the water by an Egyptian princess (symbolic rebirth). He becomes an Egyptian prince living in a palace (rite of aggregation). Second sequence: 1a. Moses is now an Egyptian prince. b. He kills an Egyptian and flees from Pharaoh (Exod. 2:15) (sacrifice and rite of separation). 2. Moses takes refuge in the Wilderness (marginal state). 3. Moses returns to Egypt with the standing of a mighty prophet with magical powers (Exod. 4:29) (rite of aggregation)" (ibid., 585).

In view of functionalist insights, which have been supplemented rather than supplanted by structuralist approaches (ch. 3, 3-4), into the close relationship between custom, ritual and myth, extensive mythical and literary exploitation of boundary symbolism is only to be expected. Ó Riain has made important use of van Gennep's approach to elucidate early Irish material (1972 a,b), and Nagy's recent revolutionary interpretation of a range of Fenian material (1985) constitutes a large-scale structuralist application of this theory to an Irish literary genre due to figure in the next chapter. Furthermore, the account of St. Brigit's birth in section 4 of her First Life provides as literal an example of liminality in van Gennep's sense as one could wish for: "one day, however, that druid invited his king and queen to dinner, but the queen was close to giving birth. Then the king's friends and servants were asking a certain prophet at what hour the queen should bear the offspring. The druid said: 'if it should be born on the morrow at sunrise, it would have no one on earth as its equal'. But the queen bore a son before time. However, in the morning when the sun had risen, the druid's bondmaid came home carrying a vessel full of fresh milk and, when she had put one foot across the threshold (*trans limen*) of the house and the other foot outside, she fell into a sitting position upon the threshold (*super limen*) and bore a daughter. For thus the prophet had said that that bondmaid would give birth neither inside the house nor outside the house (*nec in domo nec extra domum*). And the infant's body was cleansed with that warm milk which she was carrying" (Bollandus, 1658, 119).

The literally liminal birth so fully described and heavily emphasized here resonates with other boundary situations in Brigit's conception and early life. Thus her birth on a physical threshold, neither inside not outside the house, matches her ambivalent social position as the child of a servile outcast mother and a noble landowning father, as an exile from paternal home and territory destined to return in due course (see 2 above). Moreover, the very account of her birth contains a highly wrought contrast between the son born prematurely to a great queen and the daughter born at just the right time to a humble slavewoman. The former's birth fails to pass the temporal threshold of sunrise on the morrow to earn the great destiny prophesied, whereas the latter's does so to qualify for that greatness in breach of normal social expectations.

In some narratives to be discussed later similar liminal situations on the very threshold of life leave a permanent mark. As Ó Cathasaigh puts it with the help of a quotation from Leach's essay *Genesis as myth* (1969, 11), "it is clear that these birth-marks - as they may loosely be called - have a positive function to mark out the hero as an extraordinary person. The same is doubtless true of such features of the heroic life as virgin birth, incestuous birth and so on. The structuralists offer an explanation of these features in terms of 'mediation' of paired categories (such as

legitimate/illegitimate):- "'Mediation' (in this sense) is always achieved by introducing a third category which is 'abnormal' or 'anomalous' in terms of ordinary 'rational' categories. Thus myths are full of fabulous monsters, incarnate gods, virgin mothers. This middle ground is abnormal, non-natural, holy. It is typically the focus of all taboo and ritual observance.' The hero belongs to this 'middle ground', for there can be no doubt about the anomalous character, the otherness, of the heroic life-pattern" (1977, 45-6).

Liminal situations obviously cluster round Brigit and other Irish heroic figures, both saintly and secular, to be discussed below precisely because of the hero's universal liminal status and associated mediatory function. In his seminal study of the northwestern Amerindian Tsimshian myth *The Story of Asdiwal* (1978, 146-97; see ch. 3, 4), Lévi-Strauss has duly emphasized this aspect. The son of an earthly human mother and a supernatural bird father, the restless Asdiwal fails to maintain stable relationships and proves to be an inveterate two-way oscillator between divine and human wives, life and death, matrilocal and patrilocal residence, East and West, home and abroad, mountains and sea, earth and heaven, earth and subterranean regions, human and animal society, human and bird form etc. before finally being immobilized and turned into stone halfway up a mountain. This extraordinary career is punctuated by numerous contradictions, particularly in the second half when "from neutral the myth goes into reverse" and "the king of the mountains . . . is caught on a caricature of a mountain, one that is doubly so because, on the one hand, it is nothing more than a reef and, on the other, it is surrounded and almost submerged by sea. The ruler of wild animals and killer of bears is to be saved by a she-mouse, a caricature of a wild animal. She makes him undertake a *subterranean journey*, just as the she-bear, the supreme wild animal, had imposed on Asdiwal a *celestial journey* . . . The man who had killed animals by the hundreds goes this time to heal them and win their love. The bringer of food . . . becomes food, since he is transported in the sea lion's stomach" (1978, 160-1).

D. Alan Aycock has recently applied Lévi-Strauss's insights concerning Asdiwal to the well known story of Lot and his wife (Gen. 19:1-38), which he sees as progressing between five thematic poles: firstly, from "the restraint and social formality" of "the hospitality offered by Lot to the two angels sent by God" to the "intemperance and social insensibility" of "the drunkenness of Lot as a consequence of the wine given him by his daughters"; secondly, from the companionship "of two males, disguised, and strangers to Lot" to that of "two females, 'disguised' by Lot's drunkenness, and his intimates in more than one sense"; thirdly, from "the impending destruction of Sodom by God" to "the creation of the tribes of the Moabites and Ammonites, descended from the incestuous relationship of Lot with his daughter"; fourthly, from "the 'Culture' of the city" (Sodom) to "the 'Nature' of the wilderness" (the cave in the hills above Zoar); finally, from "a society of homosexuals, who by virtue of their (apparently exclusive) sexual preference *cannot* produce children" to "an incestuous association precipitated by Lot's daughters, who justify their actions by asserting that they *must* bear children" (Leach and Aycock, 1983, 114-5). Lot himself accomplishes the journey, "a metaphorical rite of passage from an old society to a new one" (ibid., 116), but his wife, being "anomalous both in the society of homosexuals she has abandoned, and in the incestuous ménage à trois which eventuates" (ibid., 117), suffers petrification in the middle Asdiwal-style by being turned into a pillar of salt, the ritual significance of

which as a symbol of purification, covenant etc. in the Near East is pointed out by Aycock. "The permanent geographical immobilization of Lot's wife in the wilderness of nature between the old Culture of Sodom and the new Culture emanating from the caves in the hills above Zoar should thus be interpreted as a moral analogy of her permanently liminal status in the rite of passage she chose to abort" (ibid.).

Tírechán 38 (1-3) offers a basically similar but simpler early Irish example of a companion's liminal immobilization on the way to an ascetic eminence reserved for his master alone: "and Patrick proceeded to Mount Aigli to fast there for forty days and forty nights following the discipline of Moses and Elijah and Christ. And his charioteer died at Muiresc Aigli, that is, the plain between the sea and Mount Aigli, and he buried that charioteer Totmáel and gathered stones for a tomb and said: 'Let him be so for ever, and he shall be visited by me in the last days'. And Patrick went forth to the summit of the mountain over Crúachán Aigli, and stayed there for forty days and forty nights" (Bieler, 1979, 152).

All of this brings us to the nub of the matter. Being by definition abnormal, the hero does not fit neatly into ordinary human society and categories. As a superhuman but usually non- or only half-divine frequenter of the margin between men and god(s), society and outsiders, culture and nature, life and death etc., the hero can move freely between these worlds without belonging properly to any of them. Ambivalence and liminality are the hero's essential attributes, and mediation between what threaten and may ultimately prove to be irreconcilable opposites is his or, more rarely, her essential function. Not all heroic types manifest these traits as chronically or intensely as an Asdiwal or, in Irish tradition, a Finn mac Cumaill (Nagy, 1985, 120-1), but the risks of constantly living on the brink are such that a single failure can trap the hero in no man's land, paralyse and destroy him.

As mediators between man and God in life as well as the afterlife by virtue of being mortals with an exceptional endowment of divine grace and power, saints function very much as the heroes of Christian ideology. This is doubtless the fundamental reason why, *mutatis mutandis*, the medieval Irish saintly and secular heroic biographies have so much in common. The cross-fertilization between these genres has already been discussed (1 above), but speculation about which influenced the other most seems less important than the observable fact of an appreciable degree of clearly deliberate homogenization throughout the period that concerns us here. Whatever their various ultimate roots, saints and secular heroes as presented in the literature both belonged to the same early medieval Irish mythology-cum-history.

In terms of the periodization of that history into two main epochs before and after the faith, marked by Patrick's alleged conversion of the Irish establishment in 433 A.D. (ch.3, 9), most major secular heroes obviously belonged to the 'Old Testament', so to speak, while the Christian saints were almost inevitably of the 'New', due allowance being made for the tendentious claims of certain Munster churches that their founding saints had actually preceded Patrick (McCone, 1984b, 49-54; Sharpe, 1989). To that extent the partial assimilation of saint to secular hero and vice versa was presumably motivated by considerations of historical typology, since it has already emerged that this exegetical device for harmonising the Old with the New Testament played a major role in shaping the attitudes of medieval Irish *literati* to the history or *senchus* of their own island and race (ch. 3, 11; ch. 4, 9). After all, if the lives of great Old Testament figures like Moses, Joseph and Elijah bore

significant affinities to that of Christ in the Gospels (cf. 2 above), why should the biographical patterns of major pre-Christian Irish heroes not similarly resonate with those of the Christian saints?

5. Itself a, or even the, supremely liminal event, the birth of a hero(ine) destined to cross and recross all manner of thresholds is particularly prone to be enhanced by further liminal associations, Brigit's nativity being a patent example. The conception and birth of Níall Noígíallach in *Echtra mac nEchach* have already been compared with those of Brigit (2 above) and are similarly charged with surplus liminality aimed at underlining the hero's peculiar nature and status.

Here too we find a high ranking father among his own people and a servile mother, who is, moreover, a foreigner once possessed of high rank in her own land. Níall is born on the *faithche* or 'in-field' (Charles-Edwards and Kelly, 1983, 154), a manifestly liminal place of sanctuary (McCone, 1984d, 48-9) between the central walled homestead (*les*) and the world beyond. For the stranger poet who rescues and rears him away from his family the exposed Níall is literally a *fríth faithche* or "find of the in-field". Significantly, this term is used in *Críth Gablach* (l. 257) as a metaphor of the *fer fothlai* or "man of withdrawal", a commoner aspiring to lordship who "stands as it were half-way between the two: he has 'secretly discarded his *bóaire*-ship' (249) by taking clients, but he has not yet reached the full status of an *aire déso* (the lowest of the noble grades)" (Binchy, ibid., 89). In the case of bee swarms at least (Charles-Edwards and Kelly, ibid., 82-3 and 154-6), a *fríth faithche* is shared by the finder and the *faithche*'s owner for a time before reverting to the latter. In effect, this is what happens to the infant Níall, who enters his finder's charge temporarily but eventually returns across the *faithche* to the bosom of his family. As the earlier synopsis shows, there ensues a further separation, this time with his brothers in the wilderness, followed by the hero's triumphant return, vindicated as his father's heir.

The beginning of Tigernach of Clones' Salamanca Life offers an interesting inversion of the more usual pattern whereby the mother is the social and/or political outsider in relation to the father. "The venerable bishop (*praesul*) Tigernach, born of royal stock, (was) the grandson of king Echu, who lived beside the fort of Clogher . . . When, therefore, the aforesaid king Echu had raised three most beautiful daughters in his palace, one of these, Derfráech, fell in love with a certain nobleman among her father's soldiers, a Leinsterman by birth called Cairbre. When she had become pregnant from the same, she hid herself from men's sight until she should give birth and, when she bore a son, his father took him and proceeded in haste to his native province" (Heist, 1965, 107). When father and child reach Kildare in Leinster, St. Brigit foretells Tigernach's future greatness. After subsequent travels abroad (see 7 below), Tigernach first founds a church in Leinster, but his ultimate destiny is to return to his maternal grandfather's Airgíalla territory and establish the great monastery of Clones (cf. McCone, 1984, 313-4 and 319-21).

We may now proceed to a pair of birth narratives, one from saga and the other from hagiography, that display striking affinities both with each other and with Brigit's natal episode. The first from the vernacular *Cath Maige Mucrama* concerns the legendary Munster Éoganacht dynast Fíachu Muillethan ("Broad-crown"): "now it is from this that Fíachu Broad-crown was named. The pains of childbirth seized Moncha daughter of Díl at Áth Nemthend on the Suir. 'It is unfortunate that

it is not tomorrow morning that you are brought to bed', said her father. 'If it were then', said the druid, 'the child would take precedence in Ireland forever'. 'So it shall be then', said she. 'Unless he come through my side, he shall come no other way'. She goes from them into the river. She lets herself down about a stone that is in the middle of the ford. 'It holds me back', she said. She was in that fixed position until the hour of tierce the following day. 'It is time now', said her father. She collapses. She dies. Now the head of the infant had widened out against the stone, whence he was called Fíachu Broad-crown" (pars. 42-3).

The piling up of liminal symbols in this passage is truly remarkable. Fíachu's mother waits for the crucial passage from one day to the next immobilized on a stone dividing the middle of the river dividing the land, a boundary within a boundary, and passes over from life to death just as her son is making the reverse transition from non-existence to life. A similar but less elaborate combination of birth, death and a river is alluded to by *Cóir Anmann*: "Furbaide, then, i.e. his excision (*furbad*), i.e. his cutting out of his mother's womb after her drowning in the river called Glaisse Beramain, and it is from that Eithne, the daughter of Eochaid Feidlech, that that river is called Eithne today" (par. 255).

The second example opens the Salamanca Life of St. Áed in Latin. "The holy bishop Áed who is called son of Brecc (*filius Briccii* = OIr. *mac Bricc*) was descended from the Uí Néill (*de Nepotibus Neill*) but the mother of Saint Áed traced her origin from the race of Munstermen, from the race of Múscrige Thíre. When she was pregnant and close to giving birth, a certain prophet came past her house and said to her companions: 'there is in this house a woman giving birth. If the infant to whom she is giving birth should be born tomorrow morning he will be great before God and men in all of this island of Ireland'. She said in reply: 'unless he come through my sides, he shall not emerge until tomorrow from my womb'. Rising up then, she went outside and sat on a rock. And the Lord performed this miracle. For the head of the infant stood on the rock and made a concavity in it after the likeness of an infant's head, and down to the present day it remains and water that appears in that concavity heals every disease for every believer" (Heist, 1965, 167-8).

All three narratives are based upon the desirability of birth on the morrow, but in the case of Fíachu and Áed this is achieved by the same delaying tactic of sitting upon a rock. The inverted results of the baby's head pushing against the rock are conditioned by the divergent aims of etymologizing Fíachu's name and of providing an aetiology for a miraculous concavity in the rock where Áed was supposedly born. The liminal aspects of Áed's nativity are weaker and less explicit than those pertaining to Brigit and Fíachu, but are present nonetheless. The passage of a time barrier is, of course, a shared feature, and Áed's mother moves from inside the house over the threshold to the outside, the reverse of the direction taken by Brigit's mother, in order to give birth on a rock rising up heavenwards from the ground, a very suitable intermediate locality for the emergence of a saint. It may be added that Áed's parentage, with an Uí Néill father and a Munster mother, spanned the most important political division in early Christian Ireland (ch. 10, 3-4).

6. Fíachu Muillethan had the misfortune of losing both parents, since his father Éogan had already died in battle the day after the 'one night's stand' with his host's daughter that brought about her pregnancy. In *Cath Maige Mucrama* Fíachu's conception and birth (pars. 39-43) are directly followed by a deliberately parallel

account of the future Tara king Cormac's conception when his father Art is given his host's daughter to sleep with the night before his death in the same battle as Éogan (pars. 44-7).

Cormac's actual birth is not mentioned in *Cath Maige Mucrama*, but the opening of *Scéla Éogain ⁊ Cormaic* also juxtaposes the conception and birth of the two heroes, this time giving a somewhat sketchy version of Fíachu's birth and a fuller account of Cormac's. "When Cormac was born the druid-smith Olc Achae put five protective girdles on him against wounding, against drowning, against fire (cf. ch. 6, 4), against reproach, against wolves, i.e. against every evil. Not long after that she was asleep on the green (*faithche*). A she-wolf came and, unbeknown to her, took her son away. And the bitch put him on the teat of her breast, and she did not know whither he had gone. There was a trapper there in that country, Luigne Fer Trí his name. He came to trap game around the litter of wolves and he catches the boy there - as for him, he used to run with her wolves. Luigne Fer Trí took him with him, and he was fed by him for a year. His mother learns of that. She went to Luigne Fer Trí and took him from him and tells him how things were with the boy" (pars. 11-13; O'Daly, 1975, 68-9 and Ó Cathasaigh, 1977, 121). His mother then travels northwards through the wilderness with the young Cormac to place him in fosterage with Fíachra Cassán in the North, whence he comes to Tara at the age of thirty to claim the kingship from his father's slayer Lugaid Mac Con.

The significance of the Indo-European myth of the future king nurtured in the wild by a she-wolf will be discussed later with reference to another version of Cormac's birth, *Genemuin Chormaic* (ch. 9, 7). Here it will suffice to note the hero's transition from human (mother) to animal (she-wolf) company and back (Luigne), from civilization (mother) to the wilderness (she-wolf, Luigne) and back (mother, Fíachra), the final goal being Tara and the kingship. Like Níall above, Cormac here is found on the *faithche* between homestead and wilderness, but this time the finder is an animal.

A striking hagiographical instance of suckling by a she-wolf, very similar to the Cormac story in basic pattern and implications, is provided by the beginning of St. Ailbe of Emly's Salamanca Life. "However, the father of St. Ailbe was called Olcnais and lived with king Crónán in the region of Artrigi. There he secretly knew the king's own bondmaid, Sant by name, and slept with her. Knowing, however, that the bondmaid had conceived through him, Olcnais, fearing death at the king's hands, became a fugitive, and the bondmaid bore a son. However, when king Crónán saw his bondmaid's son, he said: 'that ignoble boy, born of a servant and a bondmaid, will under no circumstances live under the roof of my house and be brought up with my sons'. Then the king's servants put the the boy down under a certain rock and left him there, where his name is venerated down to the present. However, a wild she-wolf lived beneath that rock, and she, loving the boy greatly, like a kind mother gently reared him among her own whelps. One day, while that wild beast had wandered in the woods to seek food, a certain man endowed with natural good named Lochán son of Lugar, seeing the boy among the whelps under that rock, took him and brought him to his own home . . . Lochán son of Lugar, however, gave him as a reward to certain Britons who were in service in the east of Clíu, and they brought the boy up and called him Ailbe because he was found alive under a rock, and God's grace was with him" (Heist, 1965, 118; the etymology is presumably based upon OIr. *ail* "rock" and *béo* "alive"). Ailbe then manages to

travel with his foster-parents to Britain and goes on to Rome before returning to Ireland to begin his mission.

A variant involving incestuous union and the wolf's domestic counterpart the dog occurs in the account of Mes Búachalla's birth in *Tochmarc Étaíne*. Horrified to discover that the woman he had rescued from the *síd*-mound and made pregnant, thinking her to be his wife, is in fact his daughter, who then bears him a daughter, king Eochaid declares "I and my daughter's daughter shall not behold one another", whereupon "two of his household go to put her into a pit with beasts. They visit the house of Findlám the herdsman of Tara which was in Slíab Fúait in the midst of the wilderness. There was no one in the house. They consumed food there. Then they put the girl to the bitch with her whelps that was in the pen in the house. They go away again. The herdsman and his wife come to their house and saw the fair infant in the pen. That amazed them. They take her out of the pen. They brought her up without knowing her origin, and her growth was good, as she was the daughter of a king and queen. She was a better seamstress than every (other) woman. Her eyes used to see nothing that her hands could not embroider. She was brought up in this way by Findlám until Eterscél's people saw her one day and told the king and she was taken away forcibly by Eterscél and she was with him then as wife. So she is the mother of Conaire son of Eterscél" (III, par. 20).

A similar, if slightly garbled, account of Mes Búachalla's exposure is found in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (pars. 5-8), which omits the bitch and whelps but encloses the beautiful heroine in a hut with an overhead skylight but no door or windows until her royal spouse-to-be becomes aware of her existence. The night before her delivery to the childless Eterscél, however, she is made pregnant by a bird capable of assuming human form (par. 7). Thus Conaire, although generally believed and believing himself to be Eterscél's son, is in fact the offspring of his mother's brief liaison with a supernatural birdlike being, who reveals himself and provides crucial aid later (pars. 13 and 16; cf. Asdiwal in 4 above). The child of a mother herself begotten through incest, banished to the wilderness and later reborn from a tomb- or womb-like solitary confinement to marriage and civilization, Conaire has a normal public parentage that conceals a secret conception straddling the boundary between the natural and supernatural, human and animal. The very embodiment of liminal paradox and ambivalence, he is conceived illicitly in the wilderness but born and raised in civilized society with all the trappings of legitimacy and royalty.

Further examples of the incest motif are Lugaid Réoderg's triple conception in *Cath Bóinde* (ch. 5, 4), Conall's shameful fathering of three sons on his daughter Creidne (*Corp. Gen.*, 154), Eterscél's fathering of Conaire on his daughter or stepdaughter Mes Búachalla in *De Síl Chonairi Móir*, and the following account of Fíachu Fer Mara's birth in *Cóir Anmann*, which contains the further liminal motif, familiar from the Greek story of Perseus (Apollodorus II iv 1), of crossing the sea in a vessel set adrift: "Fíachu Fer Mara, whence is it? Not difficult. Óengus Tuirmech begat that Fíachu on his daughter through drunkenness after the drinking of much wine by him. Óengus deemed that very hard, i.e. for his own daughter to bear him a son. The counsel which Óengus took was to conceal the son well so that he might not be a son of his, and so it was done. The little lad was then put to sea in a boat (made) of one hide with the insignia of a king's son with him, namely a purple mantle with a goblet of gold in it. Thereafter fishermen of the king of Scotland found him in Tráig Braena under the ravens (*fona fíachaib*), so that it is

thence that Fíachu Fer Mara ("F. Man of the Sea") stuck to him after that. And his offspring took the kingship of Ireland and Scotland after him, namely Eterscél the Great descendant of Iar, and Conaire son of Eterscél, and Conaire son of Mug Láma the son-in-law of Conn etc." (par. 55).

Although this coupling of incest between father and daughter with the former's drunkenness on wine may well emanate from the biblical episode of Lot and his daughters (4 above), the incestuous heroic birth itself is too widespread a phenomenon for borrowing from the Bible to be a necessary or even probable explanation.

7. As is clear from van Gennep's formulation and the quite explicit account of Brigit's birth in her First Life (4 above), liminal mediation presupposes a basic structural opposition between inside and outside, near side and far side or the like. Pairs that constitute an 'either/or' for run-of-the-mill people tend to be a 'neither/nor' in the case of heroes, who can thus break the rules by which others are bound, but only at the price of not really belonging on either side of a given line. The boundary between two categories is, of course, the classic 'neither/nor' location, the anomalous and transient nature of which entails risk as well as opportunity. This is precisely the dilemma confronted by heroic narratives the world over, and it has been seen that early Irish saga and hagiography offer abundant illustration.

To begin with, the hero's conception typically results from an illicit and impermanent union placing him or her between parents on either side of one or more key divides. Bearing in mind that in early Ireland's highly stratified society "husband and wife in the more formal types of union should be of the same social class" (Kelly, 1988, 73), Níall Noígíallach and Brigit's origins mediate the *social* contrast *in/high vs. out/low* represented by noble father and slave mother. Typical instances of a commensurate *geographical/political* opposition *in/home vs. out/away* are Níall's local father and foreign mother, Brigit's stay-at-home father and outcast mother, Tigernach's local mother and alien father, Ailbe's stay-at-home mother and fugitive father. Still more dramatically, the almost immediate deaths of their fathers after sleeping with their mothers place the conceptions of Fíachu and Cormac virtually on the *existential* boundary between life and death itself (*near vs. far side*), while Conaire straddles the *cosmic* divide between the human and supernatural (*in/low vs. out/high*) as well as the cultural cleft between human and animal (*civilized inside vs. wild outside*) through his mother (Mes Búachalla) and bird-man father (Nemglan). Finally, the near-universal prohibition on intercourse between "primary kin" defined as "an individual's mother, father, son, daughter, brother and sister" (Fox, 1967, 33) is suspended at the incestuous conceptions of Lugaid Réoderg, Creidne's sons, Mes Búachalla (or Conaire in one version) and so on as breaches of the basic *sexual* taboo dividing immediate family from others (*near/taboo vs. far/non-taboo*). Some of these oppositions may be further expressed by differentiating an actual from an apparent father, the pair Eterscél and Nemglan being functionally equivalent in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* to the couple Mes Búachalla and Nemglan as far as Conaire's human/supernatural and human/bird dimensions are concerned.

As has been seen, the birth itself is prone to take place on various boundaries. The mother's demise just before (Furbaide) or after (Fíachu) childbirth places the hero's emergence into existence on the threshold between life and death, while the

delay of Brigit's, Fíachu's and Áed's births until the following morning involves the *temporal* boundary between two separate days and destinies (*near/low vs. far/high*). Most obvious of all, *physical* boundaries include the actual threshold (Lat. *limen*) of a house for Brigit, the cultivated *faithche* between the enclosed dwelling space (*les*) and the world beyond for Níall (both *inside vs. outside*), a stone in the middle of a river between two shores for Fíachu (*near vs. far side*), and an elevated rock for Áed (*high vs. low*).

In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (pars. 8-10) the mention of Conaire's birth is immediately followed by an account of the arrangements for his fosterage. This practice of sending young children away from home for a number of years was an important and carefully regulated early Irish institution (see Kelly, 1988, 86-90) marking the next major phase of a young boy or girl's career. For Brigit fosterage with a Christian woman combines with the drinking of a white cow's milk to mark a marginal state on the way from paganism to Christianity. In the case of some other heroes, the implied contrast *home vs. away* is intensified to *civilized inside vs. wild outside* or the like by being reared in the wilderness by an animal, typically a she-wolf, as in the cases of Cormac and St. Ailbe. Mes Búachalla's childhood is characterised by a less extreme polarity between civilized aristocratic origins and nurture among lower-class cowherds in the wilderness (*inside/ civilized/high vs. outside/semi-wild/low*) in a solitary confinement symbolic of her otherness, but in the Cormac and Ailbe tales the female animal surrogate of the real mother gives way to a male human fosterer (Luigne, Lochán) in the wild, who thus mediates the passage back to civilized fosterage (*civilized human mother > wild animal foster-mother > semi-wild human foster-father > civilized human foster-father*). The liminal significance of the various tests that a hero like Níall is required to pass is obvious, and it will be seen in the next chapter that the pattern involving the wolf reflects a post-fosterage stage in the *fían*, after which a youth would normally join settled propertied society.

Viewed in relation to birth, fosterage, *fían*-membership and settling down, the recurrent patterns of expulsion and return in early Irish versions of the young hero's biography clearly do reflect, both directly and metaphorically, key transitions in the social life cycle. Moreover, the reality underlying such patterns may be specific as well as general. Thus St. Patrick's career, as narrated by himself with what one assumes to be basic accuracy in his *Confessio* (Hood, 1978), shows classic features of exile and return. Taken captive and brought from his native Britain to Ireland in his teens (par. 1), Patrick spent six years there tending flocks in the mountain wilderness before escaping across the sea in a boat (pars. 16-8). After reaching land three days later, he and his shipmates wandered in a wilderness for twenty eight days before reaching human habitation (pars. 19-22). In Britain again some time later, he was inspired to return to Ireland and begin his mission (par. 23).

Patrick's status and the suggestive nature of these wanderings, particularly after a Gaulish visit had crystalised out of his own vague account and hybridization with Palladius had yielded a visit to Rome and papal ordination (McCone, 1984b, 47-9), made for an influential model liable to be incorporated into other saintly biographies in the heroic mode. Thus Tigernach of Clones' Salamanca Life represents him as having been captured by pirates and taken from Ireland to Britain, whence he was freed to travel to Rome and Gaul before returning via Britain to Ireland (Heist, 1965, 107-9). Similarly Éogan of Ardstraw's Life has Éogan,

Tigernach and Cairbre of Coleraine taken by pirates from Ireland to Britain. Freed and trained by St. Ninian of Whithern, they were again taken by pirates, this time from Britain to Gaul, but secured their freedom after a miracle, returned to Whithern and thence to Ireland (ibid., 400-1; cf. McCone, 1984, 307-8). Ailbe of Emly too is taken on his British foster-parents' escape from servitude in Ireland to Britain, and travels thence to Rome, where he tends pigs and receives an angelic ordination in the pope's presence before returning via pagan regions to Ireland (Heist, 1965, 118-24; cf. McCone, 1984b, 50-1).

What matters here, however, is not so much the factual or fictional content of a given heroic biography as the way in which it conforms to an internal logic of its own, a structure built upon varied restatements of a basic liminal formula geared to the hero's central mediatory function. The numerous actual variants of this abstract formula display a degree of paradigmatic interchangeability (ch. 3, 4), as with Conaire's conception through incest in *De Síl Chonairi Móir* but airborne supernatural intervention in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, and also tend to underline the hero's essential ambivalence by cumulative means. Nevertheless, it would be dangerously reductionist to regard them as merely tautologous, thereby denying any real significance to the diverse spheres in which and degrees to which they operate. Rather, a linear sequence punctuated, so to speak, by major transitions in the appropriate life cycle sustains an often non-sequential interplay between different modes and types of mediated opposition (e.g. inside-outside and high-low in a cosmic, cultural, social, sexual, temporal, political or geographical context).

8. Binchy stresses "the great gulf that is fixed between the Patrick of the Confessio and the Patrick of even the earliest Lives. In the interval the humble servant of God who speaks to us so movingly in his own writings has become a hero of folklore . . . But this glorified Patrick is not merely the successor of the hero: he has also inherited some of the more disagreeable characteristics of the very druids who were overthrown by him. He beats them at their own game, for he wins by 'bigger and better' magic; witness the ignoble competitions in thaumaturgy so industriously chronicled by Tírechán and Muirchú. Worse still, he shares to a remarkable extent their relish for malediction. According to Tírechán at least three rivers were made for ever barren of fish . . . And the rewards and punishments meted out by the saint are nicely adjusted to the hopes and fears of a barbarian aristocracy rather than to the message of the Gospel. The local magnate who 'believes' is assured that there will be kings of his seed for ever; the recalcitrant chief or druid, on the other hand, is told that his line will either shortly become extinct or will survive only in poverty and subordination. Naturally these unedifying features are much more prominent in the later Tripartite Life, but there are already sufficient examples of them to justify Dr. Esposito's view that they go back to the beginnings of Irish hagiography" (1962b, 58-9).

The fact is, however, that there was a ready supply of biblical models for "these unedifying features". Major Old Testament figures like Moses and Elijah were notable miracle workers (e.g. Ex. 14:21-9 and 15:25, 2/4 Kgs. 2:8), and it has already been argued that the thaumaturgic contest between Patrick and the druids in Muirchú drew upon that between Elijah and the prophets of Baal in the Old Testament (ch. 2, 3). Furthermore, Elijah was no mean curser himself, announcing that there would not be "dew and rain in these years except according to the words

of my mouth" (1/3 Kgs. 17:1) and informing king Ahab: "behold, I will bring evil upon thee and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and last in Israel, and will make thine house like the house of Jereboam the son of Nebat and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because thou hast acted to provoke me to anger and hast made Israel to sin" (ibid. 21:21-2). When Ahab's injured son king Ahaziah sent in succession three captains with fifty men to Elijah, the first two were destroyed with the words "if I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty. Then there came down the fire of God from heaven and consumed him and his fifty" (2/4 Kgs. 1:10 and 12) but the third escaped this fate along with his followers by submitting to the prophet, who went then down with them to tell the king "therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up but shalt die a death. So he died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken" (ibid., 16-7). His successor Elisha proved equally adept in this department: "however, he went up from thence unto Beth-el: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little boys out of the city, and mocked him, saying, Go up, bald head: go up, bald head. And when he had turned himself round, he looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare apart forty and two boys of them" (ibid., 2:23-4). Finally, it is recorded of Christ himself that "when he saw a fig tree by the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And forthwith the fig tree withered" (Matth. 21:19, cf. Mk. 11:13-4).

On the whole, the basic character and attributes ascribed to Patrick in his early Lives seem far more likely to have been adapted from Scripture than derived from a pagan Irish druidry about which manifestly tendentious monastic literary sources provide next to no reliable information (see ch. 9, 13-4). Indeed, the national apostle's early hagiographical image can be seen as above all a composite of Moses, Elijah and Christ, the biblical trio with whom both Tírechán and Muirchú compare him (ch. 4, 3), although the figure of the Old Testament prophet perhaps preponderates.

Whether they arose by accident, design or both, the significance of further striking similarities between certain Irish and biblical heroes seems unlikely to have been lost upon monastic *literati*. For instance, Níall Noígíallach's selection as future king in preference to older brothers (see 2 above) is obvously analogous to David's anointing (1 Sam./Kgs. 16:1-13), and the future judge Jephthah of Gilead's situation links the highly germane factors of illegitimacy and familial jealousy with an expulsion and return, which in David's case was determined by fraught relations with Saul: "at that time Jephthah the Gileadite was a most mighty man and fighter, who was begotten the son of a harlot by Gilead. However, Gilead had a wife from whom he received sons, and after these had grown they cast Jephthah out, saying, Thou shalt not be able to be an heir in our father's house; for thou art born of another woman. And, fleeing and avoiding them, he dwelt in the land of Tob, and destitute men and brigands were gathered to him and followed him as leader. In those days the sons of Ammon fought against Israel, and, when they pressed vigorously, the elders of Gilead went to raise Jephthah to their aid from the land of Tob, and said to him, Come, and be our leader, and fight against the sons of Ammon" (Jud. 11:1-6).

9. According to the beginning of his Salamanca Life, St. Colmán of Land Elo's parents had settled in the presumably wild valley of Oichle after fleeing a hostile attack and "while they were there, the days were accomplished that his mother should be delivered" (Heist, 1965, 209; *dum ibi essent, impleti sunt dies ut mater illius pareret*). This quotation from Luke's account of Christ's birth (2:6, *cum essent ibi, impleti sunt dies ut pareret*) is an obvious cue linking this situation to that of Jesus' parents, who were forced in the same Gospel to leave home and bear their son in the animal environment of a stable, where they were visited by lowly shepherds at a shining angel's instigation, before returning home to Nazareth. In Matthew, on the other hand, the visitors are foreign magi prompted by a bright star, and the exile and return consists of the holy family's flight from the slaughter of the innocents into Egypt, whence they return after Herod's death. There was much for medieval Irish men of letters to exploit in Gospel narratives pullulating with liminal events and situations in the life of the mediator *par excellence* between God and man (cf. Leach in Alter and Kermode, 1987, 579-99), and the opening of Colmán's Life indicates that they were well aware of these possibilities (cf. ch. 2, 3).

The sagas and pre-Patrician annals clearly link the lives of the saviour and the king of the Ulstermen in the *Táin* with that of Jesus in the Gospels. As John Kelleher has pointed out, "the death of Cú Chulainn was to be placed at 2 A.D. The choice of that date - like 33 A.D. for the death of Conchobar - was clearly to associate these heroes with Christ. Thus the lives of Christ and Cú Chulainn overlap by one year - to which may be added that each has a life-span divisible by three; each has a divine father but is known as the son of a mortal father; each dies for his people erect and pierced with a spear" (1971, 121-2).

Furthermore, in the earliest extant version of his death-tale, *Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne* in *LL* (ll. 13763-14295), Cú Chulainn also obtains a drink as he is dying (14032-40, cf. Mk. 16:36, Matth. 27:48), and appears above Emain after his death to address his people in obvious imitation of the resurrected Jesus (14174-8). These posthumous words consist of three rhetorics (ch. 2, 7-8). The first prophesies the foundation of Armagh: monks will come from Europe, inhabit the lands of Emain (*talcind trebfait íathu Emna, ticfat de Eoraip Elpae*), pray to the king of high heaven (*gigsit co rríg n-ardnime*) with Patrick (*Succet* - cf. Tírechán 1(1) in Bieler, 1979, 124) that "we may be settled in Zion by him (*co-ton: Sion -suidigthe leis*)" and "we shall go to the day of full judgment (*ragma do laithiu lánbratha*)" (14179-84). The second talks about the circumstances of Cú Chulainn's own death (14185-97), while the third, as its superscription indicates (*Cú Chulaind a-t:bert de adventu Christi*), foretells the salvation of mankind by Jesus Christ (14198-215). In this way the standard biblical device of prophecy linking the Old and New Testaments places Cú Chulainn's demise on the threshold looking forward from his own marginally pre-Christian era to Christ's imminent world mission and Patrick's future conversion of Ireland, more specifically of Emain into Ard Machae.

Cú Chulainn's immobilization on the boundary between life and death (see 4 above) is clearly articulated: "he goes towards a pillar of stone that is in the plain and put his girdle around it so that he should not die sitting or lying down (*na-r:ablad na suidiu nach ina ligu*) (and) it might be standing up that he would die (*combad ina sessam a-t:balad*). It is then that the men surrounded him, and they did not dare approach him. It seemed to them that he was alive (*andar leo ro-po béo*)" (14044-7).

In this liminal situation Cú Chulainn becomes half man and half stone, as it were, and a still more dramatic example of such a process is provided by the death-tale of Conchobur, *Aided Chonchobuir*, summarized earlier (ch. 3, 10). In this Conchobar is all but killed by a calcified brain lodged in his skull, but has his life artificially prolonged by seven years of almost complete inactivity, a living death finally brought to an end when he is briefly revived into an angry outburst at the news of Christ's crucifixion, killed by the excitement and rewarded with salvation. The immobilized monarch thus spends seven years in a state of limbo between his effective death to his own world and a resurrection to eternal life eventually made possible by Christ's redemptive sacrifice.

The Latin Life of St. Berach provides a nice hagiographical example of a less protracted immobilization of brigands on the way from impiety to Christianity, a process made to coincide with the physical crossing of river as well as a monk's passage from life to death and then back to life again. "Here one should not pass over the way in which certain impious mens, twelve in number, came one night to the man of God's monastery and, that they might the more freely be able to carry off booty with them, slew one of the brothers, who was watching over the protection of the monastery's goods. And when, having the monastery's cows as booty, they wished to cross through a certain stony ford, it happened by a miracle of God that the spears they were holding in their hands stuck firmly among the stones of the ford and their hands likewise to the spears, and thus they stood motionless in the middle of the river as if they were immobile stones. When this occurrence had divinely come to the holy man's attention, taking a crowd of monks with him, he hastens to the place where the body of the dead brother lay and, having poured forth prayer to Almighty God, resuscitated the slain brother to life. Also approaching the wretched thieves stuck through their crime afterwards, he mercifully absolved them and allowed them to depart. They then cast themselves at the man of God's feet and afterwards lived religiously according to his precepts" (par. 24; Plummer, 1910, I, 85).

It has been seen that the deaths of both Conchobar and Cú Chulainn are firmly linked to Christ's incarnation, and some annals lump all three together as watersheds from which to date the later coming of Christianity to Ireland as a whole in 431/2 A.D, the span between the two believing pre-Patrician kings Conchobar and Cormac (ch. 3, 10) also figuring prominently in the annalistic scheme of things (see Kelleher, 1971, 112).

These deliberate resonances with Christ's career also help to explain the extraordinarily elaborate triple conception of Cú Chulainn as recounted in *Compert Con Culainn*. In the first stage the Ulstermen, while on the track of magical birds, come to a house containing a man and a pregnant woman, who gives birth to a son. On the morrow house and couple have gone, leaving Conchobar's daughter Dechtire with the child, who later falls sick and dies, thus failing to make the direct transition from the fully supernatural to the fully human realm. Subsequently a little creature keeps jumping from cup to lip as Dechtire drinks. She falls asleep and sees a man in her dream who names himself as Lug, the occupant of the disappearing house, and says she is now pregnant by him with the lad she had fostered before, who would be called Sétantae. In the third stage, ignorance as to the father prompts rumours of incest between Dechtire and Conchobar in his cups, thus forcing Conchobar to betroth her to Súaldaim. However, the pregnancy was terminated,

Dechtire became pregnant again after marrying Súaldaim, and bore Sétantae alias Cú Chulainn.

There is obviously more to this intricate pattern than the normal heroic halfway house represented by the scheme of human mother plus supernatural father or an incestuous equivalent, with or without the addition of a human being generally acknowledged as the father but in reality a mere step-father. Here Cú Chulainn's fully supernatural origin in stage one is mediated by stage two, comprising an annunciation and the non-sexual impregnation of a virgin human mother by the supernatural father, into the fully human stage three. Going as it does well beyond the standard requirements of heroic liminality, this genesis of the Ulster hero *par excellence* can hardly be understood except as an orthodox allegory and 'native' typology of Christ's mysterious incarnation as set forth in the New Testament.

10. An elaborate nexus of related patterns emerges from the foregoing. These not only interlocked the heroes of pre-Patrician and the saints of post-Patrician Ireland typologically, thus providing a further means of harmonizing the pagan past with the Christian present (see ch. 4, 9), but also linked Irish with biblical heroic paradigms from both the Old and the New Testament. In this way a biographical structure concerned with liminality could itself provide essential mediation between the different historical phases that medieval Irish *senchus* sought to integrate and reconcile. A highly effective means to this end was, of course, the introduction of contacts between representatives of the different epochs, a prime example being the antedeluvian *senchaid* Fintan's clerically induced sixth-century A.D. appearance before the men of Ireland to mediate between the worlds of the Old and New Testaments, pre- and post-Patrician Ireland in *Do Suidigud Tellaich Temra* (ch.3, 11).

As Nagy points out in a valuable discussion of this type of narrative, it typically concerns the transmission of "stories which, it is implied in our texts, either are already part of the narrative tradition at the time of the encounter between saint and hero or will become part of that tradition through the encounter. One could reasonably suggest that in these stories about amicable confrontations between ancient hero and saint, the otherworlds which form the dramatic background of the pre-Christian heroic and mythological traditions are in fact being related to the Christian cosmogonic scheme of things, even if only as foils to the Christian heaven and hell" (1983, 135). However, "in both the *Síaburcharpat* and the *Acallam* the focus of attention - that of the sympathetic saint as well as that of the audience of the tale - is on a pagan otherworld as revealed by a remarkable traveller in that world who is summoned by or attracted to the Christian holy man. Also, it is important to appreciate the fact that the revealing of the otherworld through the tale of the otherworldly traveller is made possible by the presence and power of a sacerdotal figure (here, specifically, the Christian saint Patrick), who is himself the translating medium between the bearer of that revelation and the audience of the narrative tradition through which the tale is known" (ibid.).

Although it cannot, of course, be disproved, there seem to be no solid grounds for Nagy's suggestion that "it is a subtle irony indeed that the stories which symbolically depict and justify the attempts of the clerical bearers of the literary tradition to preserve the oral tradition probably stem *from* the oral tradition - that they belong to a pre-Christian genre of aetiological narrative which functioned to

legitimate the oral tradition and those whose function it was to transmit and preserve it" (ibid. 136-7). Indeed, in view of the typological bonds between Ireland's 'Old Testament' heroes and her 'New Testament' saints, between Patrick in an Irish and Christ in a world context (ch. 3, 9), the initial impulse for the constitution of this Irish literary genre may be plausibly sought in Christ's transfiguratory encounter and conversation with Moses and Elijah (Matth. 17:1-8), supplemented perhaps by Samuel's posthumous appearance and address to Saul through the agency of the witch of En-dor (1 Sam./Kgs. 28:7-20).

Given the peculiar position of *fíannaigecht* (ch. 9, 8) and major contemporaneous shifts in the literary establishment (ch. 1, 12), the twelfth- or thirteenth-century *Acallam na Senórach*'s unusually complex and extended treatment of the confrontation between orality and literacy, so well brought out by Nagy (1989), will be left out of account here on the grounds that it probably reflects a rather different situation from that obtaining with regard to *senchus* in the earlier period.

One of the older extant texts of this type, *Síaburcharpat Con Culainn* (Meyer, 1910; *LU* ll. 9220-565), the language of which is compatible with a roughly ninth- or tenth-century date, opens with Lóegaire's refusal to believe Patrick's preaching "until you resurrect Cú Chulainn for me in his glory as it is recounted in stories so that I may see and address him before me here" (9225-7). This is arranged, and Lóegaire's breath is blessed by Patrick so that he can describe the splendid sight vouchsafed to himself and Patrick's disciple Benén, who explained that Cú Chulainn had been released from hell. Since, however, Lóegaire is still not prepared to believe on the grounds that he had not had time to talk with Cú Chulainn, Patrick summons the hero again. Once again Cú Chulainn appears with all the outward trappings of glory, but his words soon reveal a broken man: "I beseech you, holy Patrick - beside you I am - may you bear me with your faithful into the lands of the living" (9297-300), a stanza reiterated at the end of his long poem below (9532-5). There follows the urgent refrain, repeated at other points in the text (9314-6, 9536-8), "believe in God and holy Patrick, Lóegaire, lest the surface of the earth come over you, for it is not a spectre that has come to you, it is Cú Chulainn son of Súaldaim" (9301-2). In response to the king's questions, Cú Chulainn adumbrates great past deeds and recites a poem about the great dangers he has faced, culminating in a visit to and escape from Scáth's grim and beastly overseas domain (9378-437).

This, however, merely paves the way for a sustained series of devastating vignettes, reminiscent of those in *Félire Óengusso*'s exultantly Christian prologue (ch. 1, 4), of his and the other mighty Ulster heroes' (Conchobar, of course, excepted) tortured helplessness in the face of hell's far worse horrors. "What I have suffered of tribulations on sea and land, more difficult for me was a single night with an angry demon. My body was wounded, the victory was Lugaid's; demons have taken my soul into the red flame. I have plied the javelin, the *gáe bolgae* assiduously; I was in the company of a demon in torment. Most powerful was my valour, my sword was hard; he pushed me with a single finger into the red flame. The kings who strive for dominion with all their might, they have no power with the son of God, an equal length their punishment. The hosts of the Ulstermen around Conchobar, brave the heroes, the demons lash them, in hell they are sorrowful. Apart from the king, the son of Nes, who fought for the son of Mary, the pick of the warriors are in hell's torment. Well have I come at your word to Patrick now, that he may bring me out of hell so that his victory is for me".

Cú Chulainn concludes by extolling the benefits of believing in Patrick and reveals that even his apparently glorious accoutrements have been supplied by the saint for the occasion. Finally, "the earth came over Lóegaire, heaven is promised to Cú Chulainn" (9539-40), *LU* alone adding that "Lóegaire then believed in Patrick" (9540).

The scheme of saint, helper-hero and king here essentially replicates that of saint (Patrick again), helper-poet (Dubthach) and king (Lóegaire again) in the legal sphere (ch. 4, 5). The pathetic dependence of the once invincible main hero of the Ulster tales upon St. Patrick in order to escape the torments of hell is unremittingly hammered home in this powerful narrative: his greatness is in the past, and only the cleric's power can recreate any semblance of it in the present or secure him a bearable future. Patrick thus proves to have virtually complete control over the hero's image and message, which invites the reader to consider Scáth's nasty transmarine kingdom as a rather pale allegorical reflection of hell, just as the blissful land overseas functions as an allegory of the Christian paradise in *Immram Brain* and *Echtrae Chonlai* (ch. 3, 13). Cú Chulainn may have escaped from Scáth's clutches under his own steam, but the real hell is a different matter. The very embodiment of the pre-Christian heroic tradition, Cú Chulainn can only be saved by entering the service of the Church and submitting to clerical manipulation.

Carney provides convenient synopses of the various main accounts of the *fallsigud* or "revealing" of early Christian Ireland's foremost literary epic, *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (1955, 166-79). The earliest attested of these (*LL* 32878-909, trans. Kinsella, 1970, 1-2) tells how Ireland's *filid* were gathered before the traditionally seventh-century poet Senchán Torpéist (cf. Thurneysen, 1921, 252, n.2) "to see if they remembered *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in its entirety, and they said that they only knew bits of it. Then Senchán asked his pupils which of them would go with his blessing to Latin lands to learn the Táin which the sage (*in sui*) had taken eastwards in exchange for the *culmen*" (32880-3), an unmistakable reference to the scholarly bishop Isidore of Seville (+636), whose enormously influential *Etymologiae* were known in Ireland as the *cu(i)lmen(n)* or "summit" of knowledge (Ó Máille, 1921). Two pupils, one of them Senchán's own son Murgen, duly set out. When they reach Fergus mac Roig's gravestone in Connacht, Murgen is left to sit thereon alone and chant a lay to it as if it were Fergus himself. A great mist descends and keeps him from his followers for three days and nights, during which Fergus appears in all his glory "and then recites the whole Táin to him as it was done from beginning to end. However, others say it is to Senchán it was recited after a fast against the saints of Fergus's race, and it were no wonder if it should have been so. Then they all go to Senchán and recount their adventures to him and he was grateful to them then" (32895-6).

Here we see the *filid* of Ireland obtaining direct access to past events in the middle ground of heroic epiphany between an inadequate oral tradition and the literate ecclesiastical learning that had supplanted it. The Church's indispensability as a catalyst of poetic revelation, also stressed in the "Caldron of poesy" (ch. 7, 6), is made still more explicit in the other versions, where various saints are invoked to help the poets communicate with Fergus, a further application of the Christian saint's perceived affinities with the pre-Christian hero and a good example of the well attested symbiosis between churchmen and *filid* in early Christian Ireland (ch. 1, 10-11). As Nagy puts it, "the role of calling forth the dead Fergus is played jointly

by the seeking poets and the saints of Ireland, who through their joined powers accomplish the extraordinary deed" (1983, 141-2). In effect, these texts candidly acknowledge that nothing like a complete Táin was available in the early seventh century, its basis in oral tradition being at best fragmentary, and that it owed its subsequent existence to the ecclesiastically mediated efforts of poets. In straightforward modern parlance, it was a literary creation smacking of monastic learning, as Thurneysen cogently argued long ago (1921, 96-7).

Being aware that full-scale literacy had first reached their island in the wake of Christianity, medieval Irish men of letters had to confront the problem of how the truth about their pre-Christian *senchus* could be known. Consequently the conversion of oral into written testimony was a matter of profound concern to them, as Nagy has shown with reference to what he dubs these "close encounters of the traditional kind": "like Patrick in the tales discussed above, the Irish *literati*, extending the bounds of the new Christian culture, were attempting to record the words of a wondrous being, the oral tradition, that had its own modes of generation and transmission" (ibid., 136).

However, it might be argued that by regularly cutting out intermediaries to recover an eyewitness account, the kind of *fíadnaise* acceptable as evidence in court (Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 90-1), this genre actually shows itself to be mistrustful or even subversive of oral *tradition*, which by definition entails a *chain* of such testimonies (Vansina, 1973, 19). That the 'close encounter' scenario was not specifically intended to justify the recording of genuine oral traditions is indicated by its application to the transmission of *senchus* as a whole, including key 'synthetic' historical schemes whose high literary and ecclesiastical content is not in dispute (ch. 3, 1 and 6-9). *Do Suidigud Tellaich Temra* has already been discussed, and a further example of this type is *Scél Tuáin meic Cairill* (*LU* 1207-1355), in which the ancient shape-changing Tuán, eager to hear God's word, encounters St. Finnian of Moville and tells him of Ireland's five post-diluvian invasions.

It thus seems that, rather than placing much trust in an actual or idealized oral tradition's capacity to transmit their pre-Patrician traditions reliably, the clerical establishment adopted an obvious enough medieval solution to the problem of authentication by claiming for the Church and her learned appendages privileged access to the truth about the past through divine revelation. Classically liminal heroes like Cú Chulainn and Fergus could then be enlisted as suitable messengers along with other bridgers of gaps such as the patriarchal Fintan and Tuán or the angelic Trefuilngid, the Church's essential controlling role being personified by a saintly go-between or near equivalent. Through such interchanges between hero and saint on the boundary between the two, knowledge of the dead or dormant pagan past could be authoritatively channeled by the Church's allies and representatives into the Christian present. In practice, this doctrine was a charter for the monastically oriented literary reworking and invention of saga and other *senchus* as required, within the limits imposed by the need to avoid straining credibility by unduly great or sudden divergences from a received tradition increasingly bolstered by writing. Charters, of course, are usually intended for use.

CHAPTER NINE

Druids and outlaws

1. The *fían* and some of its basic traits have already been alluded to here and there in the preceding chapters (ch.1, 7; ch.3, 4; ch. 5, 8; ch. 7, 3 and 8-9; ch. 8, 7). It is now the turn of these and various other groups associated with them on the fringes of early Irish society to be considered in greater detail.

In ancient Ireland the early life of a girl or, even more pronouncedly, a boy was divided into distinct phases. After being reared in the parental home during infancy (*maice*), a child of free birth was usually sent away to be fostered when still quite young (Kelly, 1988, 86), the normal age for this being seven years according to *Bretha Crólige* (par. 7; Binchy, 1938, 8-9). Fosterage for affection (*altramm seirce*) with friends or relatives for no fee may well continue an Indo-European practice, convincingly documented by Jan Bremmer (1976), of giving a young boy to the head of his mother's kin, typically her father or oldest brother, to be reared. A good literary example of this institution bordering on the avunculate, Cú Chulainn's precociously early departure for fosterage with his mother's brother Conchobar in the first of his *mac-gnímrada* or "youthful deeds" in the *Táin* (ll. 399-456), has been discussed along with others by Ó Cathasaigh (1986b, esp. 152-5). However, the type of fosterage afforded most prominence in surviving legal material is a kind of early medieval Irish equivalent of the English 'public' school entailing the professional fosterage and training of a number of children for a fee and associated privileges determined strictly by parental rank (Kelly, ibid., 87-8).

There is some disagreement between the texts as to whether fosterage was generally concluded at the age of fourteen or seventeen years, *Críth Gablach* opting for the former and *Bretha Crólige* for the latter (ibid., 88-9). However, regardless of which of these is correct or of whether they reflect variations or changes in practice, the main concern of the present chapter is with the well born young male's position during the intermediate phase between the end of fosterage (*altrum*) and the attainment of manhood (*fertu*) along with the inheritance of landed property (*trebad*).

2. Concerning the lowest grade of freeman it recognises, *Críth Gablach* asks: "why is this man called a 'man of middle huts(?)' (*fer midboth*)? Because he has come from childhood, from the law of fosterage, and has not reached manhood

(*arindí do:ndichet a mmaici, a ddligiud altruma, ⁊ nad:roig fertaid*). Is a particular age assigned to the *fer midboth* who swears concerning penalties (*imma:thuing smachtu*)? An age of fourteen years is assigned. The reason he cannot maintain testimony is that he who has not already taken possession or inheritance (*na[d]:rogaib seilb ná comarbus ria sin*) is not capable of testimony except regarding every trifle before seventeen years, unless a free adult (*fer féne*) maintain it with him" (par. 6).

Regarding the second *fer midboth* "who maintains testimony" (*con:oí insci*), it is asked: "is [a particular age] assigned [to him? It is assigned] from fourteen years to twenty, to beard-encirclement. Though it be that he acquire the estate of a cow-freeman (*bó-aire*) before he have an encircling beard, his oath does not avail except according to the oath of a *fer midboth*. Moreover, though he be without taking inheritance until old age, his oath still does not go beyond the *fer midboth*. His fief is five *séts* (i.e. two and a half milch-cows), his render a wether with its accessories. That is the render of an *óen-chiniud*, a man who does not occupy possessions or land for himself (*fer nad:treba seilb ná ferann dó fadeisin*) . . . No one is allowed to set up his house as long as he is a minor until he is capable of separate estate ownership (*sain-trebad*) and of taking possessions (*gabál selb*), (and this applies to) a *fer midboth* as long as he be an *óen-chiniud*, except his lord be counterbound . . ." (par. 9).

It is apparent from this account that graduation to full legal status as an adult within the settled landowning laity of the *túath* depended upon the fulfilment of two conditions, namely the attainment of a minimum age of twenty symbolized by growth of a full beard and the acquisition of the appropriate property rating by inheritance. Hence the reluctance of an adult warrior like Nad Crantail to fight with the beardless Cú Chulainn in the *Táin* (ll. 1443-56) or the people of Tara's initial reaction to Conaire's youthful appearance naked and armed only with a sling to claim the kingship in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*: "it seems to us that our bull-feast and our incantation of truth have been ruined since it is a beardless youth that was shown to us therein" (par. 15). In the absence of either one of these qualifications, progress from the relatively low status of *fer midboth* to the higher one of *bó-aire* or the like must wait. In the case of an under-age person with the necessary inheritance this would only be a matter of time, six years at most, but failure to inherit the requisite property might result in lasting *fer midboth* status.

Binchy's textually untenable attempt to distinguish between a junior and a senior *fer midboth* aged 14-17 and 17-20 years respectively has been effectively criticised by McLeod (1982b), who proposes a single age group of 14-20 further subdivided on the basis of non-inheritance versus inheritance. However, this view is based upon a misinterpretation of the passage about the junior *fer midboth*, which clearly states that his definitive failure to maintain testimony did not extend beyond the seventeenth year. The solution would seem to be that both age and inheritance were involved: up to the age of seventeen failure to inherit entailed the lower *fer midboth* status, the upper grade being available from his fourteenth year to one who had inherited property but only from his seventeenth to one who had not. Moreover, the twentieth year only marked transition from the upper *fer midboth* to a higher status for the inheritor of sufficient property, the landless *óenchiniud* being condemned to remain at the former level until such time as he inherited, if ever.

Apart from a brief convergence in status from the ages of seventeen to twenty, the distinction between the inheritor of independent landed property or *trebad* and

the non-inheriting *óen-chiniud* is crucial throughout, differentiating the upper from the lower *fer midboth* in the fourteen-to-seventeen age group and the full legal status of *bó-aire* etc. from the merely partial competence of the upper *fer midboth* after the age of twenty.

Who, then, was this *óen-chiniud* or "sole kin" caught in limbo, as it were, between the end of fosterage and the more or less postponed inheritance of the independent property necessary to secure full legal status as a member of landed society? Thurneysen's rather desperate suggestion that he was "the last of an impoverished kindred (*fine*)" hardly squared either with mention in the sources of "his 'kin' . . . and his relatives . . . who can impugn his contract, if it exceeds what is normal" or with his obvious lack of inheritance since "in accordance with the Irish law of inheritance whereby the collateral kin of one who dies childless inherit, such a 'last descendent' ought to be particularly rich in land" (1923, 347). On the other hand, someone legally cut off from his kin until such time as he should inherit would fit the bill nicely. One is reminded of the similar term *é-cclann*, meaning literally "without family", applied to warriors in medieval Irish sources (see *DIL*), and the classically propertiless status of the *fían*-warrior emerges clearly from *Tecosca Cormaic*'s dictum *fénnid cách co trebad* "every one is a *fían*-member until (he acquires) landed property" (par. 31, 10).

The *óenchiniud*'s likely association with the warlike *fían* is confirmed by *Táin Bó Flidais*, in which the Ulster exiles' *óenchinidi* are cast in the role of naked berserks who intervene at the crucial stage of a siege to snatch victory for them and their Connacht allies from the jaws of defeat: *la sodain at:regat anchinnidi Ulad ⁊ siat lomnochta ⁊ do:berat fobairt trén tolchar co feirg ⁊ londnus dermar co rrucsat an n-imdorus inna cind co mboí for medon ind lis ⁊ tíagait Conachta léo immalle* "thereupon the Ulster *óenchiniuds* arose stark naked and launched a strong, vigorous attack with wrath and enormous fury so that they brought the lintel down upon them (the enemy) until it was on the middle of the courtyard, and the Connachtmen joined them" (*LU* 1606-8).

3. It appears, then, that the early Irish *fían* catered for propertiless males of free birth who had left fosterage but had not yet inherited the property needed to settle down as full landowning members of the *túath* liable to military service only on proclamation of a *slógad* or "hosting" (ch. 5, 8; Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 106). Moreover, the laws associate the latter status with a formal marriage in which both spouses should ideally be of the same social class and to which both or either should contribute the requisite property (see Kelly, 1988, 70-3). Since such matrimony obviously presupposed either the inheritance of property in one's own right, typically on the death of one's father, or marriage to an heiress cousin endowed by the strictly circumscribed 'Zelophahad' rule (ch. 4, 8), members of the *fían* can hardly have been married in the normal course of things.

Given the comparative paucity of *fíannaigecht* or Fenian lore in the pre-Norman record (see Meyer, 1910b), our fullest literary accounts of the *fían*'s ideals and way of life come from rather later sources, above all that massive twelfth- or thirteenth-century composition *Acallam na Senórach*. The basic traits of *fíannaigecht* in this broader perspective have been admirably brought out by Nagy's recent revolutionary study of *The wisdom of the outlaw* (1985), and seem to be reasonably congruent with such information as earlier texts give about the *fían* as a social

institution in early Christian Ireland, the focal point of the present chapter.

Whatever the propensities of later texts like the *Acallam* to differentiate a somewhat romanticized *féindid* or *fían*-member from the disreputable *díberg(ach)* or brigand, these terms seem to have been more or less interchangeable in the earlier sources (McCone, 1986d, 1-7). Thus when in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* Conaire's fosterbrothers, the three sons of the *féindid* Donn Désa (par. 9), complain about their inability to practise the profession (*dán*) of their father and grandfather, this is described as *gat ⁊ brat ⁊ guin daíne ⁊ díberg* "theft and plunder and slaughter of people and *díberg*" (par. 18). Subsequently "they took up brigandage (*díberg*) with the sons of the lords/kings of the men of Ireland about them (*co maccaib flaithi fer nÉrenn impu*)" (par. 20), a passage that corroborates the *Acallam*'s repeated designation of *fían*-members as *maic ríg* "kings' sons" with regard to the preponderantly youthful and aristocratic make-up of such bands. Moreover, the unprovoked pursuit of Maine Milscothach's swineherd by Donn Désa's sons and their fellow *díberg*s (par. 20) is reminiscent of the temporarily resurrected son of Mac Cais's complaint to Patrick in Tírechán's memoir: "I was the swineherd of Lugair king of Irrúaith. The *fían* of the son of Mac Con slew me (*iugulavit me fian maicc Maicc Con*) in the reign of Cairbre Nia Fer" (40 (7); Bieler, 1979, 154-5).

These *díberga* or (bands of) brigands and the British counterparts with whom they eventually combine are also termed *fíanna* on occasion in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (e.g. par. 145), a particularly striking instance being furnished by the description of their landing in Ireland with murderous intent: "the brigands (*díbergaig*) leap onto Trácht Fuirbthin and bring a stone for each man with them to make a carn. For the *fían*-bands (*fíana*) distinguished at the outset between raiding and decision in battle (*eter orgain ⁊ maidm n-imairic*). It is a column that they used to plant when it was decision in battle, but a carn that they used to set up when it was raiding. It was a carn, then, that they set up that time, since it was raiding, and a long way from the house at that lest they be overheard or seen from the house. They made the carn for two reasons, firstly because a carn was customary for brigandage/a brigand (*ba bés carn la díbeirg*) and secondly so that they might discover their losses at the hostel. Every one who should come safe from it would take his stone from the carn so that the stones of the people who had been killed there would be left" (*LU* 7028-37; cf. par. 67).

The brief genealogical tale of Creidne and her three sons, eponymous ancestors of the three main branches of the Conaille of Louth, neatly illustrates the association of *fíannas* or life in the *fían* with both raiding and lack of proper inheritance: "it is a daughter who bore them to her father, i.e. Creidne the female *fían*-leader (*ban-féinnid*) was their mother, she being the daughter of Conall Costamail. Conall belonged to Conchobar's province, and was ashamed that his daughter should bear him sons. They were put from him then into the edge of the territory. For Conall was forced to separate these sons from him on account of his queen, whose name was Aífe, since the conflict between Aífe and Creidne was great. Thereafter Creidne entered upon *fíannas* to plunder her father (*do fogail a hathar*) and her stepmother on account of her sons (being put) outside their ancestral kindred. She had three nines on *fíannas*, wore her hair plaited behind, and used to attack (by) sea and land alike. It is for this she was called Creidne the *fían*-leader (*C. ba féinnid*). Seven years she spent in exile (i.e. between Ireland and Britain) until she made peace with her father", adequate lands being promised to her sons (*Corp. Gen.*, 154).

As Richard Sharpe has demonstrated (1979, 80-7), *díberg* is represented in the hagiographical record as a ritualized form of brigandage involving the wearing of special marks (*stigmata* or *signa*) on the head in token of a vow to kill someone, a particularly illuminating instance being Muirchú's description of the ferocious Ulsterman Macuil moccu Greccae "residing in a mountainous, rough and high place in Druimm moccu Echach, where he daily exercised his lordship by taking up most wicked signs of cruelty (*signa nequissima crudelitatis*, significantly glossed *diberca* in the early ninth-century Book of Armagh text) and killing passing visitors with cruel criminality" (I 23(3); Bieler, 1979, 102-3). The size of these bands ranges widely in the sources from small groups of three or five through Creidne's twenty seven above to troops several hundred strong in *Togail Bruidne Da Dèrga* (par.s 41-4), Sharpe referring to "the frequent mention of men in multiples of three, most commonly nine" (ibid., 84). The opening of *Táin Bó Fraích* may indicate a tendency for such groups to be made up of rough coevals: "fifty kings' sons (*coíca mac ríg*) was the number of his household, all of the same age (*comaís*) and equality with him both in appearance and apparel".

As might be expected of unattached young men past the age of puberty, the *fían*-members' characteristically unmarried state was no bar to sexual relations with women, however transitory. There is no shortage of such episodes in later Fenian literature (see Nagy, 1985, 52 etc.), and *díberg* seems to have been a byword for sexual promiscuity in the earlier period too. In an extraordinary narrative from the Book of Leinster St. Moling punctures his own member with an awl to avoid temptation when a neighbour's wife bares her crotch (*gabul*) to him, and then shows himself as firm a believer as W.S. Gilbert's Mikado in letting the punishment fit the crime: "'very well, woman,' said he 'may bad people distort your crotch (*ro:riastrat droch-doíne do gabol*) until they have their fill of you'. 'That shall not be true' she said. 'There is not a man in Ireland who would try it on with me, thanks to my dogs'. It is afterwards, then, that brigands (*díbergaig*) came to her so that twelve of them mounted her" (*LL* 36707-10; Hull, 1930).

However, there was more to the Fenian way of life than the sexual licence, robbery and violence particularly associated with *díberg*. Although the more harmless role of nomadic hunters in the wild so prominent in the often somewhat romanticized later accounts tends to be neglected in the older sources, its major contribution to the *fían*'s livelihood in the early period can hardly be doubted. Thus a curious Old Irish charm preserved in the ninth-century *Codex Sancti Pauli* testifies to this side of their activities as well as to the role of inheritance in determining the choice between a settled farming and a vagrant hunting career in *túath* and *fían* respectively: "I wish for the wood (wooden board?) of notice (?) and of silver raven (chief?) between fire and wall. I wish for the three thin boars. May a fairy attend my encounter with cereal and dairy produce (*ith ⁊ mlicht*) of whatever I move it for. If I be granted good luck here may it be cereal and dairy produce that I see (*ma ro-m:thoicther-sa inso rop ith ⁊ mlicht ad:cear*). If I be not granted good luck let it be wolves (lit. "wild dogs") and deer and traversing of mountains and young warriors of the *fían* that I see (*mani-m:rothcaither ropat choin altai ⁊ ois ⁊ imthecht slébe ⁊ oaic féne ad:cear*)" (*Thes.* II, 293).

Obviously these words relate to a situation due to seal the speaker's fate as a landed proprietor, if lucky, or a wolf-like wanderer of the mountains with the *fían* in search of game, if not. What might this 'make or break' scenario be? The

standard early Irish practice of dividing a patrimony equally among the surviving sons with legitimate entitlement, allowing for the extra share or *cumal senorbai* due to the eldest (ch. 4, 8), must on occasion have resulted in portions no longer sufficient to maintain two or more such heirs in their father's status. Indeed, *Críth Gablach* envisages just such a situation when it asks the following question about the rather low ranking *aithech ara:threba a deich* or "commoner who cultivates his ten": "what deprives this man of status as a cow-freeman (*bóairechas*)? For perhaps there are four or five men who are heirs of a cow-freeman (*bíte hi comarbus bóairech*) so that (being) a cow-freeman is not possible for each of them" (ll. 145-8). That such ruinous divisions might be avoided by competition between the heirs is suggested by Tírechán's account (32 (1-5)) of two brothers preparing to fight an obviously traditional pagan duel to the death to resolve just such a problem (see McCone, 1984b, 57-8). A less extreme alternative is indicated by *Gúbretha Caratniad*, in which the judge *Caratniae* recounts a series of judgements that would be false under normal circumstances but then proceeds to justify these on account of the exceptional situation applying to the case in question. Consequently, when he announces "I have given precedence to an heir without lot-casting (*rucus tuus do chomarbu cen chrannchor*)" (*CIH* 2193.22), it follows that the casting of lots was the normal procedure for resolving disputes about an inheritance that was not to be divided. One may surmise that other forms of gambling might be adopted on occasion as a means of settlement, and the playing of *fidchell* for stakes or forfeits is a prominent constituent of sagas such as *Tochmarc Étaíne* (III, par. 3f.) and *Echtra Airt* (par. 15f.)

The charm's curious opening reference to *fid* "wood" and *arggat-bran* "silver raven" in a patently indoors setting "between fire and wall (*etir tenid ⁊ fraig*)" begins to make sense on the assumption that a board game such as *bran-dub* "raven-black" or *fid-chell* "wood-sense" is involved. In his valuable discussion of the relatively few passages in medieval Irish literature giving some indication as to how these frequently mentioned games were played, Eoin MacWhite refers to Eleanor Knott's (1926, 198-9) collection of references to *brannumh* and its "chequered board (*brec-clár*)": "she shows that there is a special piece in the game called the *branán*. The word *branán* is a common poetic epithet for a chief and the piece is probably a "king-piece" of some sort" (1948, 29). Since this word is an obvious diminutive of *bran* "raven (/chief?)" and the practice of playing *fidchell* with pieces made of precious substances such as gold or silver is well attested in the literature (e.g. *Táin Bó Fraích*, par. 8), it seems likely enough that *fid* and *arggat-bran* in the charm refer to the board and key piece respectively in this game.

The following verse from a poem in *Acallam na Senórach* led MacWhite to the cogent conclusion that a game akin to the Lappish tablut was involved: "my famed *brandub* is in the mountain above Leitir Broin; five men of white silver without voice and eight of red-gold" (ibid., 30). Since the composition of the smaller side is demonstrated by a reference in a bardic poem to the *bran(án)* with his four pieces on each square around him (Knott, 1926, 198), the basic situation and proportions appear to be exactly as in tablut, in which the central square is occupied by the "king of the Swedes" surrounded by his eight men, while the opposing force of sixteen differently coloured "Muscovites" is located in four groups at the edge. A turn consists of moving a single piece in the manner of the rook in chess, the "Swedish" objective being to get the king to the edge of the board, that of the "Muscovites"

being to surround him on all four non-diagonal sides. The Ballinderry board excavated by MacWhite has forty-nine squares (7x7) and may well have been used for a game like brandub with its thirteen pieces, whereas tablut with its twenty-five men has a correspondingly larger (9x9) board with eighty-one squares (MacWhite, ibid., 33-5).

In tablut an ordinary piece is taken when two opponent pieces are placed on either side of it horizontally or vertically. As MacWhite points out (ibid., 26), this was the standard capture move in *fidchell* on the evidence of a passage in the tale of Mac Dá Cherda and Cummaíne Fota: "Good," said Gúaire, "let us play *fidchell*." "How are the men slain?" said Cummaíne". "Not difficult, a black pair of mine around a single white man of yours on the same line (*dias dub dam-sa im oín-fer find duit-seo forsin oín-tí*) striving for advance yonder" (O'Keeffe, 1911, 32). Could "the three thin boars" in the Old Irish charm be a term for a similar move in *brandub* involving two pieces about to destroy a third aligned between them? Although doubts about exactly how these games, particularly *fidchell*, were played prevent further elucidation, the foregoing does establish a presumption that the charm relates to a 'winner take all' game of *brandub* between two heirs in order to determine which of them should receive an inheritance and which should remain propertiless. It is, so to speak, an early Irish "luck be a lady tonight".

It has already been seen that a major role in the *fían* is attributed to kings' sons, and the first Salamanca Life of St. Lugaid alias Moluae gives a nice vignette of a king's son called Fáelán "little wolf" with his brigand band who subsequently becomes king and later still a monk of St. Moluae's (par. 10; Heist, 1965, 133). From this it would follow that many an early Irish king had a youth in the *fían* behind him, and it is doubtless against this background that the reminiscences in *Tecosca Cormaic* about juvenile hunting and fighting in groups of various sizes are to be understood: "O grandson of Conn, O Cormac", said Cairbre, "what were your deeds when you were a lad (*gilla*)?" "Not difficult", said Cormac. "I used to kill a pig, I used to follow a track when I was alone. I used to march against a band of five (*cuire cóicir*) when I was one of five. I was ready for slaughter (*oirgnech*) when I was one of ten. I was ready for raiding (*indredach*) when I was one of twenty. I was ready for battle (*cathach*) when I was one of a hundred. Those were my deeds" (par. 8).

It may be added that nature's bounty and the fruits of raiding do not seem always to have sufficed for the *fían*, winter presumably being a time of particular hardship when they were most liable to batten upon the settled community. References in early legal and other sources to feasts given for them will be discussed later (8 below), note merely being taken here of Cú Chulainn's claim in *Tochmarc Emire* to have inherited from his fosterfather Blaí the hospitaller the ability to feed the men of Ulster with their king for a week, during which "I support their men of art and their brigands (*fo:suidiur a ndánu ⁊ a ndíberga*)" (par. 22; van Hamel, 1933, 29).

4. Remarks from a previous article on this topic (McCone, 1986d, 13-5) will serve here to pull these various strands together and place them in a broader context indicated by the anthropological studies of Heinrich Schurtz (1902), Adriaan Prins (1953) and Frank Henderson Stewart (1977) as well as the work of van Gennep discussed earlier (ch. 8, 4).

"It thus appears that for many males of free birth in early Ireland the termination

of fosterage around fourteen years of age was followed by a stage in the *fían*, an independent organization of predominantly landless, unmarried, unsettled and young men given to hunting, warfare, and sexual licence in the wilds outside the *túath*, upon which it made claims, by agreement or force as the case might be, to sustenance and hospitality and for which it might perform certain elementary police or military services where relations were not strained by hostility. Upon the acquisition of the requisite property, usually by inheritance upon the death of the father or other next of kin, but not before the age of twenty one would normally pass from the *fían* to full membership of the *túath* of married property-owners.

"This system displays classic features of what anthropologists term 'age grading', the division of a man's life into distinct phases of activity demarcated by key transitions such as puberty and marriage, and 'age sets' of more or less approximate coevals bound together by a common rite of initiation, the 'Männerbund' or society of young male warriors being a particularly prominent association of this type.

"East Africa has proved particularly rich in systems of this kind, ranging from the comparatively simple to the enormously complex, and the Masai there have structures whose broad outlines are quite reminiscent of what has just been posited for early Ireland. Thus 'between circumcision and their formal initiation as junior warriors, boys wander in bands all over the Masai country. After initiation they sleep in special bachelor huts with the unmarried girls. Only when they become senior warriors are they permitted to marry' (Murdoch, 1959, 338). Furthermore, these segregated, unmarried and promiscuous junior warriors lead a wild life of warfare and raiding until they have acquired sufficient cattle to set up house and purchase a bride, whereupon they shave their long hair, become senior warriors, and settle down to tending their herds, raising a family, and fighting as a rule only when necessary to defend the territory. Children of wealthy parents are liable to leave the junior warrior grade earlier than average to look after the family property, while those of poor parents may have to remain junior warriors for longer than average until they can get the necessary bride-price together . . . It may be added that the use of secret warrior societies to impose order and a rough-and-ready justice is well attested in the somewhat different West African and North American Indian systems.

"It should be apparent that the junior warriors in this system have much in common with the early Irish *fían*-members, and the senior warriors with active members of the *túath* . . ., and the segregation of sexually mature but unmarried males from the rest of society, as in the case of the Irish *fían* or Masai junior warriors, was a not uncommon method of minimizing the potentially disruptive effects of their wildness upon settled society as a whole".

Furthermore, instructive though such parallels are, we do not have to look beyond medieval France's knights errant for a broadly similar phenomenon closer to home, Georges Duby's description of which (1977, ch. VII) brings out the social and economic factors involved extremely well. Duby's account has been summarized as follows: "certain well-born men termed *iuvenis* individually or *iuventus* collectively in the relevant sources emerge as a particular social group committed to a life of wandering in search of sexual and martial adventure and advantage between two settled phases, namely childhood in the parental home or place of education and married life as a father and master of one's own house. Moreover, 'the pressures which forced twelfth-century knights after they were dubbed into a life of errancy

must therefore be attributed to customs regulating the distribution of inheritances and family wealth' (Duby, ibid., 118). Continued management of his estates by a father after sons had come of age was a significant factor, and the period spent as a vagrant 'youth' varied considerably according to circumstances. Duby's concluding remark to the effect that 'such was the aristocratic youth of France in the twelfth century, a mob of young men let loose, in search of glory, profit and female prey, by the great noble houses in order to relieve the pressure on their expanding power' could be applied with virtually equal force to the Irish *fíanna*" (McCone, ibid., 15).

5. Although reliable information on this point for the early period is rather scanty, the *fían* clearly had its own hierarchy, some of its more senior members apparently being charged with the enforcement of law and order both within and without the *túath*.

Thus some old legal glosses in the H.3.18 manuscript allude rather cryptically and tendentiously to a special type of lord-client relationship within the *fían*'s membership by mentioning "a wild fief (*fíad-rath*), i.e. a fief that is bestowed in a wood (*rath ernir i fid*). An exile or raider or *fían*-member (*loingsech nó fogluid nó féinniuth*) bestows it. That is a wild fief, for it is not in the divisions of lordship (*fullachtaib flatha*), for it is not to manifest lordship in a wood or mountain; it is not customary to take a lord's third (*trían flatha*) into a mountain; likewise, then, a fief that is bestowed in a wood to an exile or raider (*do loingsech nó foglaid*)" (*CIH* 919.29-32).

The passage concerning the *aire échta* or "lord of slaughter", who is given a relatively high status equal to that of the lowest of the noble grades, is arguably the most obscure in *Críth Gablach*, which explains that he is so called "because he is the lord of a band of five (*aire cóicir*) that is left to perform slaughter in allied territory (*i cairddiu*) until the end of a month to avenge the dishonour of a kingdom (*do dígail enechruccai túaithe*) against whom recent homicide is committed. If they have not accomplished it by the end of a month they enter upon an agreement that their protections will not adhere to him (them?) any longer. Though the same band of five have slaughtered men from the allied territory, the *aire échta* can undertake (*as:com-ren*, lit. "can pay") on their behalf that neither land nor bronze cauldron is forfeit for it but only vessels to the value of a cow. He then brings them out to the end of the allied territory for their reception according to the extent of his protection and his friends. His retinue and maintenance are due as for an *aire déso*" (par. 25).

Dissenting from the view of Mac Neill and others that "the *a.é.* is the leader of a small band of 'avengers' who are left within the *túath* of the slayer and given a period of one month to take vengeance on the guilty parties" (*Críth Gablach*, 72), Binchy preferred to see him "as a member of the *túath* of the slayer. His duty is to harbour and protect the 'five men' who have been sent from the other *túath* to prosecute the blood-feud against the guilty party" (ibid., 71). This notion of a public functionary charged with harbouring a 'hit squad' bent on murdering one or more of his fellow citizens is not only bizarre, to say the least, but is also flatly contradicted by the reference in a gloss on *Cethirslicht Athgabála* to "a man beyond the territory (*fer tar crích*), namely the *aire échta*" (*CIH* 395.29) as well as by a gloss on par. 51 of *Bretha Crólige* mentioning "the removal of outrages on kingdoms and

races by the *aire échta (dingbáil greas túath ⁊ cenél don airig échta)*" (ed. Binchy, 1938, 40-1). It thus appears virtually certain that the *aire échta* and his band of five were charged with crossing the border to avenge the murder of members of their own *túath* by a person or persons from another *túath*. The apparent restriction of this process to a *túath* bound to their own by treaty (*cairde(s)*) is easy enough to explain, since the rules in question afford the band some protection in the foreign territory in return for a strict time limit on their activities. By then the dispute would have been resolved either by their failure to dispatch the wrongdoers within a month or by payment of rather low compensation for anyone duly killed. In short, these provisions were designed to prevent cross-border blood feuds from getting out of hand and could only have applied to *túatha* between which a treaty existed. The operations of an *aire échta* and his followers in a foreign *túath* with which no treaty existed can only have been legally unenforcible and correspondingly unregulated.

The glossing of the main text's *díbergach* as "the *aire échta*" in *Bretha Crólige* (par. 51) is summarily dismissed by Binchy: "it is strange that the *díbergach*, 'reaver', should be accorded a definite status: did he originally represent a member of a *fían* 'war band' (cf. Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, p. 78)? At all events the glossator no longer knew what to make of him and, in an attempt to fit him into his scheme of things, ludicrously identifies him with the *aire échta*, a kind of public enforcer of penalties against alien offenders" (1938, 71-2). However, the notion that the *aire échta* and his band of five turned loose on a killing mission constituted a *fían*, far from being absurd, is fully substantiated by the gloss on *im chert cach fénneda* "concerning the right of every *fían*-member (-leader)" in *Cethirslicht Athgabála* partially cited above: "i.e. every treasure that is due to the *fían*-member (*fénnid*), since he is like a man beyond the territory, i.e. the *aire échta*" (*CIH* 395.24 and 29). In the *aire échta*, then, we have the adult leader of a small *fían* whose relatively high rank depends upon the performance of certain rudimentary external policing duties.

A similar picture emerges in the case of the *fer-gniae* or "champion", whose martial qualifications are described as follows in *Críth Gablach*: "who is right and proper for making a king's food? A *fergniae* of three blows. What are they? A man who can strike a blow on his matched adversary so that it transfixes the man through his shield. A man who takes a man in live capture and holds him in battle. A man who smites an ox with a single blow that does not leave (anything) over. A man who runs through a prisoner without compunction (?). A man who runs through a warrior (*éclann*) in front of the host so that he falls from a single blow" (par. 43). The reasonable suspicion that such a man might be associated with the *fían* is confirmed by his place at feasts in the king's house: "on the other side, in the *fían*-champion's seat (*i fochlu féinnid* - see McCone, 1986d, 7, n. 25) a *fergniae* to guard the door" (ibid., par. 46). Finally, a legal miscellany in H.3.18 asks "what is a *fergniae*? A man with whom there are proper manly deeds (*fer-gníma*), as he enumerates in *Berrad Airechta*. He exacts her bride-price for a woman after every one has failed. What makes him a *fergniae* is that seven combats have been arranged from a combat between two up to a combat between seven and he captures a man through his prowess (*tar a gaisced*) from every one of those combats until he has the seven man-takings. It is thence he is called *fergniae*" (*CIH* 973.13-7). It appears, then, that this relatively senior type of *féindid* also has rudimentary policing duties, this time within the *túath*, where he may help to keep order in the king's house and enforce the payment of a woman's bride-price where other means have failed (see Thurneysen, 1928, 58).

6. After the sons of Donn Désa had taken up *díberg* with the sons of Ireland's nobility in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, "they had thrice fifty men under instruction when they were wolfing (*oc fáelad*) in the territory of the Connachtmen" (par. 20). The werewolf implications of the term *fáelad* emerge clearly from the following passage about Laignech Fáelad in *Cóir Anmann*: "he was a man who used to go wolfing (*fri fáelad*), i.e. into wolf-shapes (*i conrechtaib*), i.e. into shapes of wolves (*a rechtaib na mac tíre*) he used to go and his offspring used to go after him, and they used to kill the herds after the fashion of wolves (*fo bés na mac tíre*), so that it is for that he used to be called Laignech Fáelad, for he was the first of them who went into a wolf-shape (*i conrecht*)" (par. 215).

This and other attestations suggest that, although the word *cú* usually refers to a hound, it was also a generic for hound and wolf indifferently, although the latter could be explicitly differentiated by adding the epithet *allaid* "wild", prefixing *fáel* "wolf" to give *fáel-chú* or using a term like *mac tíre*. As pointed out elsewhere (McCone, 1986d, 16), the prominence of *Cú* and *Fáel* in early Irish personal names is presumably rooted in the werewolf attributes of the *fían*, while the vagrant person termed *fulla* and described as having had the *dluí fulla* or "hair of vagrancy" put on him in some texts seems to belong in this context. The association between young warriors of the *fían* and wolves in the charm from the *Codex Sancti Galli* has already been alluded to in 3 above, and in the episode of St. Moling and the neighbour's wife discussed in the same section there is a clearly deliberate irony in the fact that it is wolf-like brigands or *díbergaig*, human *coin*, who frustrate the wanton woman's confident expectation of protection by her own hounds (*lam chona*) and rape her in a gang or pack.

The band of wolf-like young warriors is a sufficiently circumstantial and widely attested phenomenon among the Celts' sister peoples to put the institution's Indo-European provenance beyond reasonable doubt. The details having been given elsewhere (McCone, 1987), it will suffice to present the broad outlines of the argument here.

The Old Irish martial name or epithet *luch-thonn* "wolf-skin" (McCone, 1985b, 175-6) has parallels in the Old Norse term *úlf-heðinn* "wolf-skin" used of the *berserkr* or "bare-shirt" warrior, who like the Irish *óen-chiniud* (2 above) and Gaulish equivalents described by Polybius (II 28-30) tended to fight naked or virtually so (McCone, 1987, 106). Lily Weiser has put matters thus in a detailed discussion of the relevant Nordic material: "the early Norse berserks are mighty fighters . . . They also wore coats of wolfskin instead of armour and were consequently also called *ulfheðnar* ('Wolfskins') . . . Furthermore they are capable of states of frenzy in which they then become superhumanly strong and invulnerable. They are usually represented as unmarried, dangerous warriors, and appear mostly in groups of two, five or, very frequently, twelve. They are usually in a king's service . . . and constitute his crack troops . . . However, they also appear as robbers and criminals on their own behalf . . . Finally, however, there are berserks who follow this way of life only in their youth, and later become good citizens . . . Berserks are presented in the tradition as pagans . . . The Viking expedition usually lasts three years, after which the young man marries and becomes more or less settled. It is clear that the Viking and the old berserk way of life have a great deal in common" (1927, 44-5).

Less precisely similar werewolf expressions are also attested in Latin, Sanskrit, Greek, Russian and Armenian (McCone, 1987, 118). Use of the word for "wolf",

more often than not a reflex of the IE form, as a personal name or a designation for outlaws is found in early Celtic, Germanic, Greek, Indic, Iranian and Hittite sources (ibid., 118-20). In addition to the early Irish evidence and an obvious representation of a young male company of spear- and shield-bearing 'wolves' on the Gundestrup cauldron of presumed Celtic workmanship (ibid., 112-4), notable further support for an Indo-European 'Männerbund' of youthful werewolves is provided by Rudra and the Maruts in Old Indic myth (ibid. 120-21), ancient Greek accounts of Arcadian, Spartan and other customs (ibid., 121-7), the Roman legend of Romulus and Remus (ibid., 127-35; see 7 below) and the particularly well researched early Germanic material (ibid., 101-4).

Moreover, at the genetically crucial level of basic vocabulary the early Irish contrast between the settled *túath* under its king (*rí*) and the vagrant *fían*, formerly *cuire*, of young warriors (*oaic*) can be reconstructed for Indo-European itself on the strength of plentiful cognates in the sister languages. Thus OIr. *túath* continues IE **tewtā*, OIr. *rí* IE **rēḱs*, OIr. *cuire* IE **koryos* and OIr. *oac* IE **hyuhn̥ḱos* alongside **hyuhen-* without **-ḱo-* suffix as in Lat. *iuvenis*, Skt. *yuvan-* (ibid., 110-1, 116-8, 141).

7. The account of Cormac mac Airt's conception, birth and youth according to *Scéla Éogain ⁊ Cormaic* has already been summarized (ch. 8, 6), and attention will now focus upon the broadly similar but on comparative and political grounds (ch. 10, 9) probably older version known as *Genemuin Chormaic*.

This begins with Art's sleeping with his host Olc Aichi's daughter Étan the night before his death in battle against Mac Con and instructing her to give the son due to be born from this union to his friend Lugnae Fer Trí of Connacht for fosterage. "The king is then killed in the battle as he himself relates. Then Étan was pregnant and it came into her mind to set out to the house of Lugnae so that it might be there she would give birth to the offspring that was in her womb" (ll. 23-4). Having set out in her chariot with a single maidservant, she was seized by labour pains and bore a son on the way. Hearing a thunder-clap, Lugnae realized that this betokened the birth of a great king in the person of Art's son entrusted to him for fosterage, and set out to find him. Meanwhile Étan slept after giving birth and instructed her attendant to watch the baby boy. "The maidservant, then, fell asleep and a she-wolf reaches them and takes the lad to the place where her whelps were and to the rocky cave that is in Cenn Craíbigi in Conachail. That is Cormac's Cave today. The woman awoke thereafter and uttered her lament, for she could not find the son. Then Lugnae reaches her and asked them what was the matter with them. The maiden told him everything, that it was to seek him she had come since it was to him the lad had been entrusted for his fosterage. Lugnae takes the woman with him to his house thereafter and said that he would grant his wish to whoever should discover information about or the whereabouts of the lad" (ll. 39-46).

Grec mac Arod happened upon the wolfcubs and boy playing at the cave's entrance, notified Lugnae and was duly rewarded with land. Then they recovered the boy and cubs, whereupon Lugnae uttered a second prophecy of Cormac's greatness, including the words *bid féindid* "he will be a *fían*-member" (cf. end of 3 above) among the list of attributes prefaced to his later kingly accomplishments. "Thereafter the boy is fostered with Lugnae and mention of his lineage to his father's enemies was not dared . . . Once Cormac and Fer Trí's sons, i.e. Ochomon

and Úathnach, were playing. He struck one of them. 'Alack,' said he 'I have been struck by a man whose parentage and family are not known except that he is a fatherless bastard'" (ll. 68-76). Distressed by this slur, Cormac complains to Lugnae, who then reveals his exalted royal parentage and prospects to him. They then set out for Tara, where Mac Con receives them well and accepts Cormac as a foster-son. This leads to Cormac's famous correction of Mac Con's judgement about the sheep and the queen's woad, whereupon Mac Con is banished and Cormac duly becomes king (ch. 5, 6).

The classic narrative of this type is, of course, the story of Romulus and Remus as told by Livy (I, 3-16). Having deposed his brother Numitor and become king of Alba Longa in his stead, Amulius guarded against rivals by killing Numitor's son and committing his daughter to the chaste life of a Vestal virgin. When she nevertheless bore twins to the god Mars, Amulius ordered these to be exposed. However, having been rescued and suckled by a she-wolf, they were then found and brought up by the herdsman Faustulus and his wife Larentia in the wilderness. At this point Livy records an attempt to rationalize the role of the she-wolf away: "there are those who think that Larentia was called *lupa* 'she-wolf, prostitute' among the herdsmen for making her body available and that opportunity for the legend and miracle arose thence" (4, 7). At any rate, the twins in the wild eventually established a Männerbund predictably devoted to hunting and plunder, the latter activity being rather romanticized by Livy along 'Robin Hood' lines: "so born and so brought up, when their age had first reached maturity, they avoided inactivity in homesteads and among cattle by wandering through the woodlands hunting. Having derived strength for their bodies and souls from this, they were no longer content with wild beasts but attacked brigands laden with booty and divided the takings amongst the herdsmen, and celebrated serious and jocose matters with these as their band of youths grew day by day (*crescente in dies grege iuvenum*)" (4, 8-9).

At a subsequent celebration of the Lupercal rite whereby "naked youths (*nudi iuvenes* - cf. 2 and 6 above) should run in sportive wantonness in honour of Lycaean Pan" (5, 2), "brigands who had laid an ambush through anger at lost booty captured Remus after Romulus had defended himself by force, and handed the prisoner over to king Amulius with accusations to boot. The main charge they made was that an attack was made by them upon Numitor's estates, (and that) thereafter, having gathered together a band of youths (*collecta iuvenum manu*), they took booty in hostile fashion. Thus Remus was given to Numitor for punishment" (5, 3-4). Remus' subsequent arraignment before Numitor leads to his and Romulus' recognition by their grandfather and then to a successful armed insurrection by them and their youthful followers (*iuvenes*), who depose Amulius and restore Numitor to the throne. Thereafter Romulus and Remus set out to found a new city, ultimately Rome with Romulus as her first king through a series of events too well known to require comment here.

The Roman and Irish tales obviously have a good deal more in common than can be plausibly ascribed to coincidence. One solution, monastic Irish borrowing from a well known classical source like Livy is likely enough *a priori*, and has been mooted by Carney on the strength of the shared feature of suckling by a she-wolf above all (1955, 291, n.6; also in Dillon, 1968, 153). No doubt Carney is right in assuming that early Irish *literati* saw the parallel with Romulus and appreciated its imperial implications for the Tara monarchy, but this does not necessitate a hypothesis of direct borrowing.

This and similar cases must, of course, be argued on their individual merits or defects, and in the present instance, as Ó Cathasaigh judiciously observes, "it is true that a writer with even a moderate acquaintance with classical literature would be expected to know something of the story of Romulus, and it is possible that both SEC and GC have derived the Suckling-element from a source which was influenced by the story of Romulus. But it seems most unlikely that this was the case. For the suckling of a hero by an animal is an integral part of the international heroic pattern: de Vries gives a host of examples. The story of Cormac carries on the old tradition, but the story of Romulus has become a 'twin saga', which Mommsen considered a development away from the original saga. It is only in the form of a 'twin saga' that the Romulus story could have been known in Ireland, and there is nothing in Cormac's biography to suggest that it has borrowed from such a source. As Cormac's Suckling is closer to the postulated common original, we are not justified in assuming that it has been borrowed from the Romulus saga unless some definite evidence can be adduced to support such an assumption. Moreover, the lupine element is so strong in the Cormac tale that it seems unnecessary to regard wolf-suckling as an 'external element', except in so far as it derives from the international pattern" (1977, 54-5).

To these arguments may be added a further one. A very close ancient Iranian analogue recorded by the fifth-century Greek historian Herodotus (I, 107-30) is clearly independent of the Romulus legend, as are certain Greek and Germanic variants of the basic type. As should emerge below, the only economical explanation of these detailed correspondences is derivation from a common Indo-European original, with which the Cormac tale too is perfectly compatible. That being so, the story of Rome's foundation would only become a more likely source for the latter on the strength of more distinctive similarities than can actually be adduced.

Herodotus' anecdote about the birth, youth and accession to the throne of the founder of the Persian empire begins with the Median monarch Astyages being warned in a dream of the threat posed by his daughter's future offspring and accordingly marrying her to a quiet Persian named Cambyses. The son born to them was then exposed on the king's orders but rescued by a herdsman and his wife and brought up in a mountainous area: "the name of the woman with whom he cohabited was Kúnō 'bitch' in the Greek tongue and Spakó in the Median, for the Medes call the bitch 'spax' (*tèn gàr kúna kaléousi spáka Mēdoi*)" (110). The child was then named Cyrus. "Now when the boy was ten years old the following happening to him revealed him. He was playing in this village in which were the herdsmen's quarters, and was playing in the road with others of the same age. And the boys at play chose for their king this alleged son of the cowherd. And he set some of them to build houses, others to be bodyguards, one of them to be the king's eye and to another he granted the privilege of bearing messages, enjoining upon each his task. Now one of these children playing together, being the son of Artembares a notable man among the Medes, did not perform what had been commanded by Cyrus. He bade the other boys seize him and, when the boys obeyed, Cyrus treated the boy very roughly to a flogging" (114). The scourged boy inevitably complained to his father, who duly brought the outrage at the hands of a mere cowherd's son to the king's attention. Cyrus's bold demeanour when brought before him and a certain family likeness raised Astyages' suspicions and eventually he forced the truth out of the boy's cowherd fosterer. Further events bring about a successful revolt by Cyrus

against his maternal grandsire, whom he replaces as king to turn the Median into a Persian empire.

Although the nurturing "she-wolf" or "bitch" is presented in this account as a woman so named, suspicions of a Greek rationalization similar to that sometimes applied to the Romulus and Remus story on Livy's evidence above are fully confirmed by Herodotus' comment that Cyrus "said he had been reared by the cowherd's wife and kept on praising her throughout and his whole story was full of Kúnō 'bitch'. Then his parents, taking up this name, put about the rumour that a bitch (*kúōn*) had suckled the exposed Cyrus in order that the survival of their boy might seem the more miraculous to the Persians" (122). Obviously, then, the Iranian original used by Herodotus, who correctly reproduces the Iranian outcome *spa-* (e.g. Avestan *spā*) of Indo-European **kwō(n)* "hound", shared with the Roman origin legend and the early Irish Cormac tale a two-stage upbringing in the wild for the future king involving suckling by a she-wolf and then fosterage with herdsmen or the like.

The rationale of this scheme in the context of the heroic biography and its essential liminal attributes has already been discussed (ch. 8, 6-7). The narrative mainspring of the initial threat to the hero and king-to-be's existence, his exile among lowly helpers and eventual return for elevation to his proper status comprises essential constituents of the international pattern that are correspondingly weak as evidence for a genetic relationship based on derivation from a common Indo-European prototype. On the other hand, there is no obvious reason why the Indo-Europeans should not have known a commonplace enough mythical schema along these lines, and circumstantial shared details within this framework would, indeed, create a presumption that this was so.

In the present instance suckling by a she-wolf or bitch specifically and disclosure of the future king's identity as a result of strife with his peers seem to constitute rather strong genetic indicators. These probabilities are significantly increased by the realizition that this mythical pattern of a king's son or successor expelled from his kin and initiated by a wolf into a life in the wilds correlates closely with the demonstrably Indo-European social institution of youth in the wilderness as a member of a predatory werewolf Männerbund or **koryos* (6 above). Once the wolf's specifically Indo-European role as the symbol or embodiment of such associations is recognised, a further Indo-European witness for this basic constellation of motifs can be found in the ancient Greek myth of Zeus' birth, youth and displacement of his father Kronos as king of the gods (e.g. Hesiod, *Theogony* 453-506; Apollodorus 1, 1, 5 - 1, 2, 1).

Kronos was notoriously wont to devour children born to him by his wife Rhea in order to thwart a prophecy that one of these would dethrone him. Understandably vexed at her wasted labour, Rhea gave her husband a stone instead of the sixth child Zeus, who was born to her in the cave of Dikte in Crete and left there to be nourished on a she-goat's milk and protected by the warrior band of Curetes. Later Zeus rescued his brothers and sisters, led them in a successful rebellion against Kronos and the other Titans, deposed his father and became ruler of the gods. Allowing for the trivial inversion of the animal and human functions in this tale (martial wolf > pastoral goat, herdsmen > warriors) and the absence of a revelation motif, it reflects the archetypal scheme quite accurately and thus corroborates it.

In Germanic tradition the *Vǫlsungasaga* (4-8) tells of king Vǫlsung's murder by his son-in-law, and the exposure of his ten sons, bound and helpless, in the forest. Of these only Sigmund survived the nightly attacks of a she-wolf, lived secretly in the wood with the connivance of the sister married to his father's murderer and incestuously fathered a son Sinfjǫtli on her. After father and son had dwelt in the forest for a time in wolfish guise, Sigmund wrought vengeance on his father's murderer with Sinfjǫtli's help and returned home to become king. Saxo Grammaticus tells a similar story in the first book of his *Gesta Danorum* (see McCone, 1987, 139). This time the two sons of a king murdered by his brother are rescued from a similar fate by faking their laceration by wolves. Thereafter they were brought up in a hollow tree like hounds (*sub specie canum*) before being discovered by their uncle and banished. Later they returned and after acting like berserks destroyed their uncle, one of them becoming king in his stead. In these cases too the (she-)wolf, although malign rather than unexpectedly benign, provides the key to the hero's destiny in a further independent version otherwise close enough to the posited original Indo-European pattern.

The widespread and detailed correspondences considered here leave little doubt that the early Irish story of Cormac mac Airt's birth and youth, particularly as told in *Genemuin Chormaic*, continues an Indo-European myth of regnal succession with little essential modification in the course of three or more millenia of presumed oral transmission. Nor does this contradict Vansina's well founded dictum that "oral traditions are conditioned by the society in which they flourish" and "no oral tradition can transcend the boundaries of the social system in which it exists" (see ch. 1, 3), given that the Indo-European age-grading institution of the werewolf society of unmarried and mostly youthful warrior-hunters seems to have survived relatively intact in early medieval Ireland as the *fían*, rather as it apparently persisted amongst Nordic peoples. The resilience of an institution attested in various forms well beyond the confines of Indogermania was doubtless due to the kind of social and economic factors identified earlier (4 above).

8. If further proof were needed that the *fían* was part of early Christian Ireland's pagan heritage, this is supplied by plentiful literary evidence for the Church's strong disapproval of this practice in the pre-Norman period. Preceding chapters have documented at some length the early Irish Church's success in adapting or reinterpreting appropriate pre-Christian concepts and institutions as necessary, the upshot frequently being an antique shell, sometimes more fake than genuine, capable of housing a new or significantly modified ideology attuned to ecclesiastical requirements. Although Old Testament figures such as Jephthah of Gilead (ch. 8, 8) and, above all, King David himself had considerable potential as justificatory models for a youth spent in the wilderness at the head of a band of outlaws prior to becoming a leader or king of settled society, the clerical establishment tended to pass over this option in favour of outright condemnation of the *fían* and what it stood for. Indeed, given the centrality of sexual licence, gratuitous violence and pillaging to this way of life, it is hard to see how the Church could have reached a meaningful compromise compatible with fundamental Christian tenets. Moreover, any temptation to do so was doubtless minimized by the *fían*-members' general lack of property and their potential to disrupt settled society.

Still more to the point, perhaps, this pillaging or *díberg* apparently extended to

Church property, to judge from the late Middle Irish *Immram Curaig Úa Corra* or "Voyage of the Uí Chorra's boat". The Faustian beginning of this tale involves a *briugu* or "hospitaller" proposing to remedy his and his wife's childlessness by doing a deal with the devil. "They then performed a fast against the devil (*do:rónsat íarom troscad ria Deman*) and the maid was pregnant forthwith and she was nurturing her pregnancy until the end of her nine months. Then there came the mighty blows and woes of birth pangs to assault the maid and she bore three sons at that great begetting, i.e. a son at the beginning of the night, a son in the middle of the night and a son at the end of the night, and they were baptised according to the pagan baptism (*ro:baisted do réir in baisted[a] geinntlide íat*)" (par. 5). As these sons of darkness grew, their prowess and beauty were generally admired but fault was found with "their baptism into the devil's possession (*a mbaisted i selb díabuil*). 'It is hard for us', they said 'not to perform raiding and brigandage and assault (*fogail ⁊ díberg ⁊ ingreim*) on the enemies of the devil, since it is he who is our king or lord, i.e. to kill clerics and to burn and destroy churches'. It is then that those sons arose and came to Tuam, and they destroyed and burned the place and they performed astonishing raiding and brigandage (*fogail ⁊ díberg adbal*) throughout the province of Connacht on clerics and churches, so that the evil and awfulness of their raiding was fully heard of in the four corners of Ireland. They continued in this fashion to the end of a year until they destroyed half of the churches of Connacht in that period" (pars. 7-8).

The probably seventh-century vernacular text *Aipgitir Chrábaid* or "The alphabet of piety" offers the following comprehensive clerical condemnation of the *fían*-life: "four things that *fíannas* causes a man, i.e. it contracts territories (*to:imairc crícha*), it increases hostility (*to:formaig écraiti*), it destroys life (*etar:diben sáegul*), it prolongs torments (*ar:cuirethar píana*)" (par. 25). The term *maic báis* "sons of death" applied to *fían*-members obviously reflects this unfavourable view of them as murderers destined for hell. The *AU* entry for 847 A.D. provides a particularly conclusive example, proving that *fíanna* could be a real menace at least as late as the mid-ninth century, by recording "the sack of the island of Loch Muinremair by Máel Sechnaill against a large *fían*-host of sons of death (*fían-lach már di maccaib báis*) of the Luigni and Gailenga who had been overrunning the kingdoms (*oc indriud na túath*) in the manner of pagans (*more gentium*)".

Early Irish hagiography abounds in episodes where a saint gets the better of small bands of what were evidently *díberg*s, often miraculously thwarting their murderous intentions by harmless delusions and not infrequently bringing the miscreants to penitence or even to monastic vows (Sharpe, 1979, 80-5). Moreover, her 'First Life' (Bollandus, 1658, 118-35) has St. Brigit give the following reason for refusing to bless a barren queen when prepared to help more lowly members of the *plebs* (= *túath*) in this way: "because all the men of the *túath* (*plebeii cuncti*) serve God and all pray to the Father. However, the sons of kings are serpents and sons of bloodlettings and sons of death (*filii vero regum serpentes sunt & filii sanguinum filiique mortis*) except for a few chosen by God" (par. 60). Evidently the eighth-century author of this Life, and presumably his seventh-century source too (cf. ch. 8, 2), regarded a disreputable life as "sons of death" in the *fían* as the norm for kings' sons in his day, only a minority resisting the temptation to enter this phase, and this, of course, fully matches evidence presented earlier (3 above) for the *fían*'s predominantly aristocratic make-up.

In the course of its description of the *aithech ara:threba a deich* (see 3 above) *Críth Gablach* insists that the robbery and violence typical of *díberg* activity are incompatible with good standing as a Christian member of settled society: "this one is a 'baptized freeman (*aithech baitside*)' if he be in his purity without theft, without robbery, without killing people (*cen gait, cen brait, cen guin doíne*, see 3 above) except on a day of battle or someone who seeks his head (= life), and have a proper marriage with (sexual) abstinence on fast-days, Sundays and Lents" (ll. 142-5).

To Robert Serpell of the University of Zambia I owe references from an unpublished thesis by Mapopa M'Tonga and further information about an interesting African parallel to this tension between the Church and a secret male society in existence before the advent of Christianity. The Nyau societies of the A-Chewa people straddling the borders of Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique basically cater for young males aged between about ten and twenty, but contain older members and are led by adults well over thirty. In essence this is a masked dancing society characterized by animal symbolism, ancestral spirit worship and a strict code of discipline liable to be physically enforced. Both the Church and the colonial administration were predictably opposed to this organization, campaigned against and in the 1930s banned it, with the result that "in certain areas, the *nyau* secret societies retaliated by forcing all the boys to boycott schools . . . In addition, the *nyau* code included the banning of such items as books, papers or pencils which were considered as symbols of christianity and colonialism. Those who disobeyed these rules were either beaten up or banished from the village and the entire *nyau* movement" (M'tonga, 1980, 130-1; cf. further Schoffeleers, 1972). Spectators may observe their ceremonies at a proper distance but those venturing too close are physically expelled, and during *nyau* performances the women tend to sing exorcising hymns near the local church. Since Nyau societies continue to exist in a somewhat attenuated form, the ban proved at most only partially successful despite the Christian establishment's earnest efforts. On leaving the Nyau society a young man would, of course, have no undue difficulty in being readmitted to the Church's fold, should he so wish.

9. Early Irish clerical condemnations frequently associate certain other categories of person, notably the druid (*druí*) and satirist (*cáinte*), with *fían*-members alias *díberga(ig)*. As Sharpe points out, "brigandage, that is the activity of organized bands of killers, was particularly abhorrent to the Church, and in the Old Irish *Arraí* is associated with druidism and satirizing among the sins for which there could be no remission of penance. It was regarded as a pagan practice and evidently had its own ritualistic code of conduct" (1979, 82).

To begin with, "in glossed fragments of *Cáin Fhuithirbe* in Dublin, Trinity College, MS H.3.18 *étualaing* 'intolerable' is glossed *cáinti* and *escoman* 'excommunicate' is glossed *cáinti* ⁊ *díbergaig* (*CIH* 772.36 and 38). These *díberga(ig)* or the like had werewolf attributes, and *Cóir Anmann* par. 240 significantly bases an etymology of *cáinte* on similar features: '*Cáinte* from *canis* 'hound', on account of the head of a hound on a *cáinte* as he bays (satirizes?)'" (McCone, 1989, 128). The diametrically opposed status and deserts of the admirable *fili* and the despicable *cáinte* according to the Church-oriented ideology of early Irish literature are well brought out in the deliberately juxtaposed episodes involving Cridenbél the satirist's misbehaviour justly avenged by his host the Dagdae and Cairbre the poet's proper

punishment of his host Bres for maltreatment at his hands in *Cath Maige Tuired* (ibid.).

According to an Irish penitential probably dating from the seventh century (Sharpe, 1979, 82), "this is the penitence of a druid *(magi)* or a cruel man vowed to evil (*uel uotiui mali [si] crudelis*), i.e. a *díbergach* (*id demergach*), or a crier (*praeconis,* = *cáinte*?) or a cohabiter or a heretic or an adulterer, namely seven years on bread and water" (Bieler, 1975, 160, par. 4). A similarly hard line is taken by the Old Irish table of penitential commutations: "for there are some sins of them that are not entitled to remission of their penance though the period prescribed for them be long, unless God Himself shorten it through death or a message of sickness or the amount of mortification someone impose on himself. Such are brigandages, druidries and satirizings (*díberggae* ⁊ *druithdechta* ⁊ *cantechda*) and such are adulteries and incest and perjury and heresy and transgression of holy orders" (par. 5; Binchy, 1962c, 58-9). A manifestly tendentious passage in *Bretha Crólige* reveals the determination of monastic lawyers to reduce the entitlement of such reprobates to sick-maintenance below the relatively high level apparently still quite often observed, rather as the Cridenbél episode in *Cath Maige Tuired* (pars. 26-30) implies that a *cáinte* should be refused normal hospitality: "there are three in the kingdom who are maintained according to the maintenance of a *bó-aire*. Neither their dignity (*míad*) nor their inviolate status (*nemthes*) nor their entitlement (*dliged*) nor their tonsure (*cend-gelt*, lit. 'head-cropping') increases their sick-maintenance (*othrus*). (These are) the druid, the brigand, the satirist (*druí, díbergach, cáinte*). For it is more fitting in God's sight to spurn then to support them" (par. 51; Binchy, 1938, 40-1).

The eighth-century legal tract *Córus Béscnai* introduces a neat delineation of the three main early medieval Irish estates of Church, settled laity and various types of outcast with the question: "how many feasts (*fleda*) are there? Not difficult. Three. A godly feast (*fled déodae*), a human feast (*fled dóendae*), a devilish feast (*fled demundae*). What is the godly feast? A gift to God, a gift of Sunday on a weekday, celebration of a festival, the feeding of an anchorite, a gift to a church, the feeding of a company, refection of God's guests, comforting the wretched, consecration of a church, feeding paupers, comfortings that may sustain them for the poor. It is required of lords that they enforce each of them on their clients. What is the human feast? Everyone's alehouse feast for his lord according to his entitlement with which there go according to deserts dinner party (*feis*), supper (*fuiririud*), lunch (*dithit*). In the equal divisions of refections distinctions are arranged, refection of maintenance for a kingdom's allies, for the seeking of truth and right, for answering wrong. Mutual obligation of the *Féni* in feastings (and) refection. The propriety of service regarding hosting, encampment, pledge, assembly, vengeance, posse and vigilante action, serving God, furthering the work of a lord and of everyone for his lord, for his kin, for his abbot. Protecting his lord with every enrichment and benefit according to God and man as regards good conduct, good law, good attention. For every proper profit, every render, every nobility, every good reputation due to a lord is lawful. Attending to the warding off of every loss from his lord. Every due is bound, levied, enforced, paid for inviolate persons (*do neimthib*) according to God and man. A devilish feast, i.e. a feast which is given to sons of death (*do macaib báis*) and bad people, i.e. to buffoons (*do druthaib*, but in view of attested confusion between forms of *drúth* and *druí* possibly originally *do druídib* "to druids") and

satirists (7 *cáintib*) and begging poets (7 *oblairib*) and farters and clowns (7 *fuirseoraib*) and bandits and pagans (7 *geintib*) and whores (7 *merdrechaib*) and other bad people. For every feast that is not given (read *na:tabarr*) for earthly exchange and is not given for heavenly reward, that feast belongs to the devil" (*CIH* 524.18-526.19).

Here too, then, we find "sons of death" or *fían*-members accompanied by druids (or buffoons), satirists, other reprobates and pagans (*geinti*) in general at a feast stigmatized as "devilish" in contrast with the "godly feast" entailing Church dues or other acts of charity and the "human feast" centring around hospitality or other obligations due from a client to his lord.

This collocation of devilish, godly and human feasting is given narrative expression in a long entry under the year 721 in the so-called 'fragmentary' Annals concerning the Cenél nÉogain king of Tara Fergal mac Máele Dúin (+722) and his two sons and eventual successors, the warlike *fían*-leader Áed Allán (+743) and the pious Níall Frossach (+778), founder of a whole line of Tara monarchs. "At that time Fergal made a prophecy for his sons, i.e. for Áed Allán and Níall Cundail, and it is from this that that came about for him, i.e. one day they came to him in Ailech Frigrenn, i.e. Áed the elder son, who was a clever, cruel and vigorous prime young warrior (*cét-óclach*), it is thus that he came, with large well armed bands to Ailech. It is thus, however, that the younger son came, quietly, temperately and peacefully with small numbers, and what he said through his own diffidence and in his father's honour was: 'it is better for me', he said, 'to go outside for lodging than to stay as guest with you tonight' . . . Thereafter the older son, i.e. Áed, was brought into the great palace with his people. However, the young son, i.e. Níall, was taken to a lovely secluded house. They were entertained in due course and their father wished to test them together and came at the end of the night to the house in which the older son was and was listening to that house. It is vehement and foul that people were in that house. There were clowns (*fuirseoiri*) and satirists (*cáinteda*) and whores (*echlacha*) and begging poets (*oblairi*) and louts (*bachlaig*) roaring and bellowing there. One lot drinking, another asleep, another vomiting, another piping, another whistling. Drummers and harpers playing; a group boasting and arguing. Fergal heard them thus. And then he came to visit the secluded house in which the younger son was and he was listening to that house and did not hear anything there except thanksgiving to God for everything they had received, and quiet melodious harping, and songs praising the Lord being performed. And the king greatly perceived fear and love of the Lord in that house. Thereafter the king came to his own bed and greatly took heed of the situation of those two houses" (Radner, 1978, 60-3).

On the morrow king Fergal, unable to stay in the elder son's house for the filth and stench from the previous night's debauchery, visited the younger son Níall and found him praying. After some sleep "the son said to his father, 'dear father,' he said, 'it is proper for you to feast with us awhile here, since there remains with us half of what food and drink was given from you to us last night'. And he had not finished that, when servants brought out a great vessel full of mead and numerous foods and they feasted silently and peacefully together then. When everyone had got up, the king came out into his own house and recounted in the presence of all how the fortunes of those two sons would be. And he said that the older son would assume sovereignty and that his reign would be sturdy, valorous, vigorous, terrifying and lustful. The younger son, however, that he would assume sovereignty

piously and decently and that his descendants would be famous and royal and would take the kingship every second time. That is, moreover, what has been fulfilled hitherto" (ibid., 62-3).

Here, as in the hagiographical record and elsewhere, we find monastic authors quite prepared to acknowledge that life in the detested *fían* might precede succession to the kingship. However, this barely avoidable concession to current realities did not blunt their desire to draw a congenial moral where possible, in this case by admitting that both sons became kings of Tara while reserving the foundation of a major royal line to the pious non-Fenian brother.

Given the evidence already presented (3 and 8 above) for a tendency on the part of kings' sons to join a *fían*, the *cáinte*'s connections with such company are further evinced by the figure of Glasdám "the satirist of the king of Ireland's son with his nine satirists around him" seeking hospitality in the *Bórama* text (*LL* 38391-2; *cáinte meic ríg Hérend cona nónbor cáinte imme*). Similarly noteworthy is the legendary Cathbad's status as both druid and *fían*-member (*sech ba druí-side ba fénnid*) who goes on a murderous "circuit of *fían*-activity (*cúaird fénnidechta*)" in the opening section of *Scéla Conchobair maic Nessa*.

It would seem, then, that in marked contrast to the ecclesiastically esteemed and connected *fili* and *brithem* (ch. 1, 10-12) some sections of the *áes dáno*, notably the druid and various types of versifier such as the *cáinte*, were an object of clerical opprobrium and excommunication by virtue of pagan attributes and a tendency to associate with the similarly stigmatized *fían*. For this reason it is quite inadmissible to use a king's slaughter of satirists (*cáintí*) as evidence for royal hostility towards poets (*filid*), as Mac Cana does in the case of the *Bórama* tale just mentioned about the deaths of Glasdám and his *dám* or following of satirists (1979, 472-3).

As the foregoing discussion has shown, the clerical establishment seems to have been quite successful in marginalizing what it saw as these unsavoury elements, a process doubtless facilitated by the fact that the vagabond *fían* was intrinsically peripheral anyway. However, the continuing role of some senior *fían*-members like the *fergniae* and *aire échta* in the public enforcement of law and order (5 above) suggests that obvious clerical propaganda for complete outlawry of the *fían* and its satellites proved relatively unsuccessful, presumably because of the institution's usefulness for military training and the partial relief of pressure upon the food supply as well as inadequate inheritances (4 above). After all, as Goody observes, "we cannot expect the same close fit between religion and society that sociologists often perceive in non-literate cultures when the reference point is not some locally derived myth subject to the homeostatic processes of the oral tradition but a virtually indestructible document belonging to one of the great world (i.e. literate) religions" (1968, 5), and there is no reason why the Church should have been more successful in early medieval Ireland than elsewhere in securing full implementation of its social and moral aspirations by a more or less sinful Christian majority. Indeed, even certain satirists may have had a public examining function in the *túath*, albeit one hardly calculated to endear them to *filid*, if one is to believe the following gloss on *cáinte* in the passage from *Bretha Crólige* (par. 51) cited earlier in this section: "for the lampooner's knowledge of all the metres (*ar aichni na n-uili n-aisti acin drisiuc*) so that he does not let a poet (*fili*) into the territory except according to paths of entitlement".

10. After enumerating eight types of *sóer-bard* or "free bard" and a further eight of *dóer-bard* or "base bard" the first Middle Irish metrical tract asks: "and the free bards, then, what differentiates them into grades? Not difficult. According to their skills (*asa ndánaib*) do they increase and differ. As each grade of poets (*filed*) increases beyond the other in learning and composition (*i sous ⁊ airchetal*), so does each of these increase beyond the other in amount of learning and metre (*in imud sois et segda*), apart from letters and syllables and inflections etc. And it is on that account that they only attain half the honour-price of the poets (*leth-enecland na filed*). For he is not paid in grades who neither learns nor is learned from (*nád:foglaind nad:foglainnter húad*), who neither studies nor is studied from (*nad:frithgnai nád:frithgnaither uad*)" (par. 3; Thurneysen, 1891, 6). Then, after exemplifying the various rhyming syllabic metres practised by them and assigning them to these different grades, the same text concludes: "it is for this reason that a regulation of rewards is not defined here, because these metres are new forms (*núa-chrotha*), because it is recent authors (*núa-litridi*, see ch. 1, 12) who discovered them. But it is in accordance with the generosity and liberality of everyone for whom they are made and in accordance with the skill and excellence of everyone who makes them that their rewards are paid. However, if it be according to true entitlement of poetic art (*éicse*), their rewards are paid at half the value of the chief metres (*na prím-aisti*, i.e. those exclusive to the *filid*). For it is not easy to despise them, since their gifts are from God . . . It is thus that they are not paid with equalities of honour price to the folk of study (*fri hóes ind frithgnama*)" (par. 68; ibid., 23).

As has already been pointed out (ch.1, 12), the *Ériu* 13 tract on the privileges and responsibilities of poets explicitly states that the bard's method of composition was essentially oral in the pre-Norman period. Consequently the above passage's equally categorical ascription of the invention of the metres they used to recent writers, themselves apparently influenced by Latin hymnody (ch. 2, 6), provides about as strong an indicator of the dominant influence of literacy in early medieval Irish culture as one could wish for.

Although his very lack of the literacy, formal learning (*foglaim*) and long course of study (*frithgam*) required of a *fili* (ch. 1, 12) restricted the oral bard's honour-price and rates of pay to at most half that of a trained poet, certain types of free bard were nevertheless highly regarded in lay society: "thus one of the grades of *sáer-bard* is called a *túath-bard ad-daim túath* 'a *túath*-bard whom the *túath* acknowledges', while of the others the *tigern-bard* is an aristocrat with twelve clients as well as being a bard and the *rí́g-bard* is both king and bard" (McCone, 1989, 129). To Liam Breatnach we now owe an extensive collection of material relating to the grades of *filid, baird* etc. (1987, 3-60), on the strength of which he makes the following important observations: "an essential feature of the seven grades of poets is that they are the successive stages in a progression which an individual may make in his own lifetime . . . Here we have one of the features which distinguish the *filid* from the *baird* . . . Nowhere.. do we find mention of the bards progressing from grade to grade. Note especially the definition of *tigernbard* as a person who is both a lord and a bard, and of *rígbard* as a person who is both a king and a bard in BN XIII. That factors other than ability in *bairdne* are taken into account surely indicates that we have a ranking due to relative importance, rather than a system of progression from grade to grade" (ibid., 87-8).

However, when we move from the free (*sóer-*) to the base (*dóer-*) bards, whose

inclusion of the *cáinte* and his ilk can just be discerned through a tangle of terms, our sources register a steep decline in respectability and entitlements. Thus two categories on the first metrical tract's list of base bards, the *long-bard* and *drisiuc*, are spoken of slightingly in Breatnach's *B(retha) N(emed) IV* passage (ibid., 36-9), and the *dul* and *drisiuc* are similarly lowly rated in *BN V* (ibid., 40-1).

As regards terminological confusion or overlap in this area, "the law tract *Míad-shlechta* follows the descending seven grades of *fili* with *bard, fer cerda* and *cáinte*, defined as *fer ara-rósar a bíad t(resi)n ainim aíre* 'a man on account of whom his food be obtained through the blemish of satire' with obvious relevance to the behaviour of Cridenbél, but *cáinte* does not normally figure explicitly in lists of this type. However, some of the terms found in other lists may be associated or even equated with the *cáinte* elsewhere. Even if such equations were not entirely accurate, they would still indicate that the profession in question was regarded as very similar to that of the *cáinte*. *Mittelirische Verslehren* II pars. 132-35 is a section describing the metres of the base bards or *dáer-baird* and of the so-called 'subgrades of poets' (*na fográd filed*) consisting of *taman, drisiuc* and *oblaire*, and the same three subgrades are given by *Uraicecht na Ríar* and by glosses on *Uraicecht Becc* whereas some *Bretha Nemed* material presents a collocation of *bard, drisiuc* and *dul*. It has already been pointed out that *dul* and *cáinte* appear to be interchangeable in the Cridenbél tale and Cormac's Glossary.., and we have seen that *oblaire* and *cáinte* appear together at 'devilish' feasts. In *Mittelirishe Verslehren* I par. 1 and *Ériu* 13, 41.12 the *drisiuc* appears as a grade of the *dáer-baird*, but at *Bretha Crólige* par. 51 *cáinte* is glossed *.i. in drisiuc* and elsewhere it is said of the *drisiuc* that 'he sticks in the face/honour of everyone' (*lenaid i n-inchaib cáich*) and 'is a briar on account of laceration and a hound on account of fierceness and wickedness' (*is dris ar letarthaigi ⁊ is cú ar aminnsige ⁊ ar anble*). The *taman filed* appears as an alternative to the *sacaire* or, in one version of the relevant material, the *cáinte* in a passage relating to the *fían*. To some extent this interchangeability of terms may be due to the fact that *cáinte*, like *fili*, is generic whereas *oblaire, drisiuc* and so on, like *dos, cano* etc., refer rather to specific grades within the class. At any rate, *Uraicecht na Ríar* informs us that the *drisiuc* should have ten compositions for an honour-price of a scruple but the *oblaire* only five for an honour-price of only half a scruple" (McCone, 1989, 129).

The Cridenbél episode in *Cath Maige Tuired* (see 9 above) depicts a *dul* or *cáinte* demanding food from his victim by means of an implied threat to assault his honour if refused (McCone, ibid., 123-4). This is precisely the import of doggerels put into the mouths of the *drisiuc* and *oblaire* elsewhere, the *taman* likewise being given a short begging poem (ibid., 129-30), and it seems clear that their offensive threat of satire for gain rather than its properly defensive use to avenge wrongdoing was made a target for criticism by clerics and their *filid* allies (ibid., 130-2).

A further obvious ground for disapproval was the *cáinte*'s already documented tendency to serve members of the *fían* loathed by the Church, and the native etymology of *drisiuc* just given agrees with that of the *cáinte* (9 above) in stressing canine or lupine aspects also typical of the *díberg(ach)* or *féindid* (6-7 above). Furthermore, the association of certain presumably base types of *bard* with the *fían* rather than the *túath* is indicated by the personal name *Fían-bard* and by a reference in the *Ériu* 13 tract to bards supported by young warriors of the *fían* (McCone, ibid., 129). It thus seems that early Ireland's *literati* recognized a threefold stratification of

versifiers according to the sort of training involved and the social milieu in which they operated. First came the exalted *fili*, literate by dint of a long monastically oriented education and able to function in Church or aristocratic lay society (ch.1, 10-11 and Breatnach, 1987, 89-94), then the skilled but illiterate *sáer-bard* operating within the respectable confines of the propertied laity, and finally the dubious category of *dáer-bard*, including the *cáinte* etc., apparently hard put to find willing patrons outside the propertiless *fían*. The latter's members in turn presumably found such versifiers' threats of shame through satire a useful adjunct to or substitute for the menace of physical violence in the quest for hospitality.

11. There is, then, clear evidence for clerical hostility towards the various categories of actual or alleged pagan outlaw and excommunicate with which this chapter is principally concerned. Since the *fían* appears to have been unusual in an early Christian Irish context in that its very survival depended upon resistance to rather than accommodation with the ecclesiastical interest, it is hardly surprising that its basic ethos should have been little affected by Christianity and have proved so retentive of a pagan inheritance with deep Indo-European roots evinced by a wealth of comparative details. It was, moreover, almost inevitable that such an institution should have provided a focus for other elements such as druids and satirists that the Church disapproved of and sought to eliminate or at least ostracize from civilized society.

The reference to *geinti* "pagans" in a text like *Córus Béscnai* (9 above) proves that such people, or at least people so regarded by the Church, were still to be found in pre-Viking eighth-century Ireland. Although paganism may have survived among the settled population in some remoter parts, *Félire Óengusso*'s triumphalist assertions of Christianity's total victory in Ireland at the end of that century would have had an embarrassingly hollow ring if this had been the case on any scale. At any rate, the only good evidence that admittedly tendentious texts offer for anything approaching organized paganism in early Christian Ireland relates to the *fían* and its satellites. However odious such recalcitrants may have been to the Church, life in the *fían* was frequently a mere youthful phase prior to the inheritance of property and sometimes even accession to the kingship, processes of settling down that seem normally to have gone hand in hand with marriage and admission or readmission into the Christian community. Indeed, the monastic literature's somewhat grudging acknowledgement of this behavioural paradigm, especially in the common hagiographical motif of *díbergs* brought to repentance and forgiveness, could only serve to underline the transience of a period spent sowing wild oats at a relatively convenient remove. Perhaps this helps to explain why the Church's bark apparently proved worse than her bite in this matter.

Although the details cannot now be recovered, conflict between Church and *fían* will have introduced new tensions into a hitherto cohesive social system in which male age grades played a prominent role. This in turn presumably presented the *áes dáno* with an increasingly stark choice between a career amidst the Church and her adherents in the settled *túath* or one with the *fían* of excommunicates. The inherent paganism of his calling inevitably placed the druid on the wrong side of the tracks, while figures like the *cáinte* may already have been strongly associated with the *fían* and simply shared its fall from grace. Among the less affected, perhaps, was the free bard (*sóer-bard*), who continued to compose orally for the secular nobility, albeit

eventually in metres born of literacy, and the success stories were undoubtedly the *fili* and *brithem*, whose early association with monastic literacy and learning brought high status and great rewards in its wake (ch. 1, 10-12).

The anticlerical stance of the *fían* in association with certain *áes dáno*, notably the *druí* and *cáinte*, and others stigmatized as pagans by the Christian establishment makes this the obvious place to expect the relatively unsullied survival of non-Christian oral traditions. In view, however, of the demonstrable dependence of such traditions upon their immediate social environment (ch. 1, 3) and of what Goody terms "the homeostatic organization of the cultural tradition in a non-literate society" whereby "what continues to be of social relevance is stored in the memory while the rest is usually forgotten" (1968, 30-1), it would be surprising if the corpus in question were not rather radically affected by the shrinkage and increased marginalization of the social base to which it referred. Those traditions geared most closely to the institution least shaken by the change in religion, the *fían* itself, would be expected to survive best, and the comparative evidence presented earlier indicates that this was indeed the case.

A further 'distorting' factor for the oral purist must also be recognised. Since the literate have no difficulty communicating orally with the illiterate, even limited literacy has resulted in "cultures which were influenced to some degree by the circulation of the written word, by the presence of groups or individuals who could read or write. They lived on the margins of literacy, though this is a fact that many observers have tended to ignore" (Goody, ibid., 4-5). In early Christian Ireland an obvious case in point is the illiterate bards' adoption of metres developed by the literate from Latin models (10 above).

Nevertheless, interesting though snippets of evidence in the written record for the survival of paganism on the fringes of medieval Irish society may be to the social historian, this phenomenon can be of little or no relevance to our assessment of the ideology underlying an extant literature known to have emanated from the monasteries. Indeed, the prejudice and antipathy consistently displayed towards the *fían* and its satellites by these selfsame sources show just how hostile the authors of our texts were to practices and beliefs they perceived as pagan. Like it or not, the early Irish literature available to us is "the thoroughly processed product of a monastically oriented literate learned class whose material and intellectual interests extended far beyond the confines of the cloister" (McCone, 1989, 134).

12. It has already been pointed out (ch. 1, 9) that the post-war nativist notion of the *fili* as the old druid 'protectively metamorphosed' or the like by superficial Christianization is no more than wishful thinking. Hard to square with the attestation of both in the early Christian (9 above) and, arguably, the pre-Christian period (ch. 4, 1 and ch. 7, 4)), it is quite at variance with the early medieval Irish sources' determined but possibly tendentious denial of any such relationship between the two. This ideological point is particularly well made in Muirchú's Life of Patrick, which consistently depicts *magi* or druids as virulent and inveterate opponents of the Christian mission (e.g. I 10, 15-17, 20 in Bieler, 1979) in marked contrast to the judge Erc and poet Dubthach, who adopt the new faith with alacrity as prime representatives of their respective professions (ch. 4, 3). Tírechán, on the other hand, brings out the incompatibility of druidry with Christianity by stressing the need to abandon it as a prelude to conversion in the episode of two initially hostile

druid brothers who finally believe in Patrick's God, do penance and accept a new tonsure in token of entry into the Church (26 (17-19), ibid.). Whatever the truth about the missionary period itself, this view is doubtless first and foremost a reflection of the contemporary seventh-century druid's actual paganism.

With greater apparent justification Gerard Murphy had already offered the early medieval Irish *fili* an alternative pagan Celtic ancestor scarcely less attractive than the beloved druid. "*Fili* according to its etymology might mean 'seer' (cf. Welsh *gwel* 'see'), and ninth-century Irish tradition tells us that *filid* were indeed considered capable of attaining mystic vision by the method of divination known as *imbus forosnai* (*Sanas Cormaic*, ed. Meyer, *Anecdota*, IV, p. 64, 756). Poetry, which in medieval Ireland was the special function of a *fili*, might formerly have been called *gwawd* in Welsh, and Welsh *gwawd* is etymologically akin to Irish *fáith*, 'a prophet'. *Fáidsine*, the function of a *fáith*, is attributed to *filid* by an ancient law-tract (Laws III 30, cited in translation by Professor MacNeill, R.I.A. Proc., XXXVI, C, p. 273, n.2). Moreover, a *fili* is called a *fáith* in the *Colloquy of the Two Sages* (par. 272), and Fedelm, the *banfháith* of the *Táin*, is sometimes called *banfhili* (Professor and Mrs. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, I, 613). There is therefore reason for believing with Professor and Mrs. Chadwick (*l.c.*) that *filid* and *fátha* were originally the same. If that is so, they represent an Irish order identical in origin with the Gallic learned and mantic order known to the Romans as *vates*" (1940, 200).

As Murphy's own diffidence implies, the etymological case for tracing the Christian *fili* back to a pagan *fáith* is too weak to be taken seriously. Moreover, equations of *fáith* with *fili* in the literature are similarly inconclusive, since Old Irish *fáith* is commonly applied to biblical prophets (see *DIL*) and Ireland's righteous pre-Patrician poets had been deliberately correlated with prophets of the Old Testament in the native typology devised by early Irish *literati* (ch. 4, 3-5).

Earlier still, Thurneysen had ventured the shrewd, if unromantic, opinion that the *filid* were a pre-Christian outgrowth of the bardic order that entered into a close relationship with monastic learning particularly soon after the introduction of Christianity (1921, 66-7). Quite recently, solid textual evidence has been adduced for a considerably later differentiation along these lines. Arguing that the poetic grades were modelled upon a system of seven ecclesiastical grades hardly established before the seventh century, Breatnach concludes: "the earliest text we have which sets out the seven grades of *filid* is the eighth century *Bretha Nemed*. The version of BN in *Ériu* xiii also has eight and seven grade systems for the bards. In two passages in the Nero Avii *Bretha Nemed*, however, we have a different system, viz. the six grades of *fili/deán, lethcherd, admall, bard, drisiuc*, and *dul* . . . I would suggest, then, that in these two passages we have a trace of an earlier state of affairs where the the *bard* and *fili* were not so sharply distinguished, and that the seven grade system of *filid*, which cannot be much earlier than the eighth century, reflects a reorganisation of the system on the basis of scholarship, which is the essential feature which distinguishes the *fili* from the *bard* (see pp. 97-8). This hypothesis would fit in well with what we know of the close co-operation between the secular and ecclesiastical learned orders at this period, and with the fact that writing in Irish, to any significant extent, is hardly much earlier than the seventh century" (1987, 99-100).

13. As has already been seen, portrayals of recalcitrant post-Patrician druids in the literature tend strongly to be negative. Harsh treatment in penitentials or the like and diminution of status in the laws (9 above) were obviously due to their continuing paganism in the face of Christianity, an authoritative aetiology for this rejection by the Church being supplied by Muirchú's depiction of the leading druids' vicious hostility towards St. Patrick and his message in king Lóegaire's day (12 above).

A further typical enough instance occurs in the Latin Life of St. Berach, which recounts a protracted and royally adjudicated conflict between the saint and a powerful local druid anxious not to be supplanted by him (Plummer, 1910, I, 80-5). To the druid's expostulation that he should not be deprived of his native territory the saint replies "your father Satan, having been cast out of heavenly inheritance, wretchedly plummeting to the bottom, sought the depths of hell. You, therefore like your father are not fit to possess this land dedicated to God; rather shall you share an infernal inheritance with your father the devil" (par. 13). In view of evidence already presented for druidic connections with the *fían* of mostly young aristocrats, some significance attaches to the the druid's incitement of noble youths (par. 14, *iuvenes nobiles*) against the saint, an assault duly foiled by their miraculous immobilization. When the druid (*magus*) proved unable to save the youths, the king sent his soothsayer (*ariolus*, see below) to discover the cause of their misfortune, and then begged the saint's forgiveness (par. 15). The continued intransigence of the druid "full of treachery and malice" (*perfidia atque invidia plenus*) in the face of St. Berach's further miracles eventually led to his own destruction as well as that of the descendants who sought to avenge his death (par. 23).

Clear evidence for the influence of biblical models upon clerical thinking about and literary representation of the druid is provided by the consistent employment of *magus* as a Latin equivalent of Old Irish *druí*, a usage already well established by the mid-seventh century on the evidence of our earliest extant saints' Lives, penitentials and so on. The Book of Daniel has already been identified as the source for the evil *magi, incantatores* and *auruspices* at Lóegaire's Tara court in Muirchú's narrative (ch. 2, 3), and the general incompatibility of *magi* or *arioli* with true religion is uncompromisingly expressed by God's commandment *ne declinetis ad magos, nec ab ariolis aliquid sciscitemini, ut polluamini per eos* "do not turn aside towards magicians, neither inquire aught of soothsayers to be defiled by them" (Lev. 19:31).

King Lóegaire of Tara is forewarned of the victorious coming of Patrick and Christianity by two druids or *magi* in a poem, given in Latin by Muirchú (I 10), who makes it clear that the composition was not his own, and in Irish by the Tripartite Life (Mulchrone, 1939, 22). Any doubts that this scenario is based upon the disturbing message of the *magi* to Herod concerning the advent of the King of the Jews in Matthew 2 are dispelled by the unmistakable verbal echo of that very episode at Muirchú I 16, 1 after his druids' second warning to Lóegaire about the new faith (see ch. 2, 3).

14. The unrepentant druid's representation as a devilish anti-Christian reprobate worthy of death from the coming of Patrick onwards inevitably raises the question as to why monastic writers were prepared to represent him as an awesome figure of great dignity in sagas and other narratives set in the pre-Patrician past. Are we dealing with the uncritical preservation of genuine 'pan-Celtic' pagan traditions

reflecting the druids' erstwhile high priestly status before Christianity knocked him from his perch, as nativists are prone to claim (e.g. Mac Cana, 1983, 14)? If so, the clerks responsible for propagating this favourable image while inveighing against the surviving druid's diabolical paganism can only have been stupid, schizophrenic or both. Since the evidence accumulated in preceding chapters strongly suggests they were neither, a more rational explanation for this clearly deliberate distinction between the pre- and post-Patrician druid is called for.

Given the druid's apparently continuing, if shrinking, role as a pagan priest in the Christian period, the basis of this dichotomous perception presumably lies in the change of established religion mythologised as Patrick's conversion of Lóegaire and his minions. An extremely obvious precedent for a priesthood lapsing from somewhat patchy virtue into outright villainy through murderous hostility towards the bringer of Christianity is, of course, provided by the climactic Gospel narratives of Jesus' rejection and arraignment by the priests and scribes of Israel, who thus forfeited their privileged status. However, this dramatic transformation did not prevent the Church's exegetes from forging typological and allegorical links that made the Old Testament Jewish priesthood serve as a justificatory model for its Christian successor. Thus the Irish Canons, citing Isidore, urge contemplation of the fact "that Aaron was the archetype of the high priest, i.e. the bishop, and that his sons foreshadowed the type of the (Christian) priests (*Aaron summum sacerdotem, id est episcopum figurasse,et filios eius prespiterorum figuram praemonstrasse*)" (*Can. Hib.* I, 4).

Since scriptural patterns and current exegetical techniques were undoubtedly exploited in abundance by early Christian Irish *literati* to present the history of their island and people as a microcosm of a world history centred upon the Bible (e.g. ch. 3, 7-11), the druid's incorporation into this scheme would be almost inevitable. From the Church's standpoint the highly desirable corollary would be that pre-Patrician druidic privileges and endowments could be claimed by clerics, just as the Old Testament priest's mantle had descended upon his New Testament counterpart.

The episode of Berach and the druid (13 above) revolves round the latter's hereditary claim to the land miraculously granted to the saint. Berach's retort, quoted in the previous section, amounts to a blanket assertion of clerical rights to the patrimony forfeited by druids on account of their diabolical paganism, just as Satan was justly deprived of his heavenly inheritance.

The three groups represented by the *Senchus Már* prologue and *Uraicecht Becc* as major contributors to the Patrician legal settlement were clerics or bishops (*ecalsa/epscuip*), poets (*filid*) abetted by judges (*brithemain*) and kings (*flaithi*) (ch. 4, 6), but the great pre-Patrician lawmaking assembly held by Cormac mac Airt according to *Scél na Fír Flatha* (ch. 4, 7) sought "to arrange his proper due to each in the drinking hall (*a dliged díles d'ordugud dǫ chach áen i tig midchúarta*)" according to the portions of meat that came out of a cauldron over which an "incantation of king and poet and druid (*díchetal flatha ⁊ filed ⁊ druad*)" had been sung (par. 8). Both sets of guarantors correspond not only to the three Old Testament orders of *reges* "kings", *prophetae* "prophets" and *sacerdotes* "priests" (or alternatively kings, judges, priests; see Ó Néill, 1979, 154) recognised by early Irish exegesis (ch. 4, 6) but also to each other, due allowance being made for the paradigmatic interchangeability of cleric and druid. This, of course, leaves little doubt that *Scél na Fír Flatha* deliberately equates the two as the pre- and

post-Patrician occupants respectively of the *sacerdos* slot in biblical typology.

A further striking example of such assimilation is provided by the ordeal of *airisem oc altóir* or "waiting at an altar" described as follows in the same text: "i.e. a proof that they used to have at that time to distinguish between falsehood and truth (*etir gaí 7 fír*), i.e. waiting at an altar, i.e. going nine times around the altar and afterwards drinking water with a druid's incantation on it (*tria díchetal druad fair*). Now, the sign of his sin was manifest upon him if he were guilty. No harm was done to him, however, if he were innocent" (par. 24). The subsequent claim (loc. cit.) that this ritual had been brought from Israel by the righteous pre-Patrician judge Caí Caínbrethach (ch. 4, 7) is a clear indication of adaptation from an Old Testament original, the obvious candidate being the divinely sanctioned ordeal in Numbers 5:11-28 to determine whether or not a woman has committed adultery: "the priest (*sacerdos*) shall offer it and set her before the Lord and shall take holy water in an earthen vessel and shall put a little earth from the floor of the tabernacle into it . . . and thus let him give the most bitter waters to the woman to drink. When she have drunk them, if she is defiled and is guilty of adultery in her husband's despite, the waters of malediction shall pass through her and after her belly hath swollen her thigh shall rot and the woman shall be as a curse and an example to the whole people. But if she be not defiled, she shall be innocent and shall bear children" (vs. 16-7, 26-8). One wonders if this could have been the source for the saga motif in *Compert Con Culainn* and elswhere of miraculous pregnancy from a small creature in a drink (ch. 8, 9), but the essential point for present purposes is rather that the priest's officiating role in the Old Testament ceremony is taken by a druid in its ostensibly pre-Patrician Irish adaptation.

It was argued earlier that the depiction of saints in early Irish hagiography owed more to biblical, particularly Old Testament, models than to alleged druidic prototypes (ch. 8, 8). Indeed, some similarities may well have arisen because the druid's literary image, too, probably reflects biblical and other ecclesiastical influences. In other words, the druid of Latin and vernacular early Irish sources, particularly those pertaining to the pre-Patrician period, may best be seen as the largely artificial creation of monastic *literati* concerned with historical typology. This would not, of course, preclude the incorporation of genuine druidic attributes into a hybrid construct concocted when druidry still continued to exist on the fringes of Christian Irish society, albeit probably in a somewhat adulterated form. Nevertheless, the idea that the medieval monastic literature preserves anything approaching a reliable record of the pre-Christian druidic establishment must be dismissed as naive.

The basic issue here can be illustrated by the well known motif that the men of Ulster were forbidden to speak except in reply to their king Conchobar, while Conchobar himself could only speak in reply to one of his three druids (e.g. *Táin*[1] 3428-9; *ba airmert di Ultaib ní:labrad nech díb acht fri Conchobar, ní:labrad Conchobar acht ressna tríb druídib*). Even if this should be a literary survival of the pagan druid's exalted pre-Christian status as his king's social equal or even slight superior, one must still ask why such a tradition was deliberately perpetuated in writing by representatives of a monastic interest otherwise demonstrably determined to undermine the position of actual druids. The answer, surely, lies in the typological divorce of the post- from the pre-Patrician druid to make way for the latter's association with the Christian priest or bishop. In that case the pre-Christian chief druid's high standing in relation to the king would constitute a useful historical

precedent for that claimed by monastic lawyers for his Christian successor. Thus *Críth Gablach* grants the bishop a retinue predictably equal to that of a king (cf. ch. 1, 10) before posing its final question: "which of them is more venerable, the king or bishop? A bishop is more venerable because the king rises before him on account of the faith (*fo bíth creitme*). A bishop, however, (only) raises his knee before a king" (par. 48).

The final major piece of the typological jigsaw has now fitted into place. Through being correlated with the law and the prophets that reached fulfilment by foretelling Christ and paving his way in the Bible, the monastically oriented jurist (*brithem*) and poet (*filí*) could be accorded a similarly positive role in relation to Patrick and the coming of Christianity to Ireland. The recalcitrant pagan druid (*druí*), by contrast, invited comparison with the priests (*sacerdotes*) of Israel, who became unredeemedly degenerate through rejecting Christ and thus left the way clear for the Christian clergy to become the true successors of their generally admirable Old Testament precursors. It is to be stressed that early medieval Irish ideology treats the *filí*'s godly prophetic role as a historical constant and accords him no share in a priesthood or *sacerdotium* seen as the exclusive preserve of the pre-Patrician druid and the post-Patrician cleric successively.

CHAPTER TEN

Politics and propaganda

1. Genealogy lay at the heart of early medieval Irish *senchus* and could, indeed, like law simply be referred to as *senchus* (e.g. Meyer, 1912, 295, 302, 317, 324) or its Latin equivalent *peritia* (ibid., 361; *Corp. Gen.*, 67 etc.). The sheer size of the extant written record bears abundant testimony to its assiduous cultivation and manipulation. In Ó Corráin's expert opinion, "the very bulk of the Irish genealogical materials is daunting. The published genealogies and origin-legends of the twelfth century and before contain the names of some 12,000 individuals. But this is by no means all. If we add the materials in unpublished tracts (and these are still, unfortunately, unindexed) the total should come to not less than 20,000 names. This covers the prehistoric or mythological period, proto-historic times, and the historic period proper which begins about AD 550 (and I have excluded the detailed genealogies of the later middle ages). I believe that the most - and certainly over two thirds - of the individuals named are historical personages. Thus, for a period of about 650 years (roughly equivalent to twenty-two generations), we have 12,000 individuals whose names, family connections and dynasties are given in the genealogical tracts. When we turn to collectives, the sources record some 2,500 tribes, families and dynasties - and that is a conservative estimate. It may be useful to indicate the degree of detail. For the Cianachta, a relatively obscure people, we have the names of over 100 individuals and eight lineages. For the Corcu Modruad, a relatively minor kingdom in Co Clare, we have the names of some 290 individuals and some 94 collectives. For the Uí Bairrche, an (un?)important Leinster people, we have the names of about 200 individuals and 80 lineages. For the tiny Meath kingdom of Lóegaire (whose dynasty claimed to be descended from Lóegaire mac Néill and whose genealogies were evidently kept at the monastery of Trim) we have the names of 552 individuals (amongst them those of some of the abbots of Trim and their wives) and 44 lineages",(1985, 55-6).

The prodigious scale and elaboration of what is, after all, a written corpus go well beyond the retentive capacities of actual oral traditions as observed by anthropologists, who regard even royal pedigrees some twelve to fifteen generations deep as remarkably long (e.g. Vansina, 1973, 153; Goody, 1968, 31) and northern Somali examples "sometimes consisting of more than thirty named ancestors" as quite exceptional (Lewis in Goody, ibid., 272). For an oral testimony to remain

manageable it seems that "the added depth of lineages caused by new births needs to be accompanied by a process of genealogical shrinkage; the occurrence of this telescoping process, a common example of the general social phenomenon which J.A. Barnes has felicitously termed 'structural amnesia', has been attested in many societies" (Goody, ibid., 32-3).

The best prospect, then, for an addict of orality confronted with an early Christian Irish record bearing all the marks of elephantiasis would be to argue that an enormous number of local oral genealogies had been gathered, harmonised and codified by *literati*, but even so improbably arduous and disinterested an undertaking would hardly have been technically feasible without significant doctoring of the raw data. Add to that the early linkage of Irish with biblical genealogies (ch. 2, 2; ch. 3, 7), plus the interweaving of ecclesiastical and secular figures (cf. Ó Corráin, ibid., 52; 1981), Latin and Irish in the older genealogical collections, and the case for a decisive monastic role in their compilation and maintenance becomes virtually unanswerable. Indeed, in a recent article in Irish Ó Corráin has argued cogently "that they are a historical source that is fully rooted in a written tradition, that there is no evidence to demonstrate an oral tradition later put into writing, and that it is Ireland's learned clergy who composed and preserved these same genealogies" (1986b, 71) by showing among other things that "there is usually a connection between the antiquity of the text and the amount of Latin in it: the older they are, the more abundant the Latin" (ibid., 73).

These claims are, of course, fully consonant with the monastery of Emly's fame as Ireland's main centre for *senchus* and with the known monastic affiliations of the greatest specialist in this field, the *senchaid* or "historian" (ch. 1, 10; cf. Thurneysen, 1921, 67).

The comprehensive genealogical system was further tied to a prolonged chronology going right back via Noah to Adam, one in which major figures at least were liable to be given more or less precise dates, as in the Rawlinson B. 502 list of Irish kings accompanied by the length of their various reigns (*Corp. Gen.*, 117-22). As a result, early Irish genealogies were apparently more prone to expansion than to telescoping due to 'structural amnesia' in a strictly oral milieu, an undisputed instance of such 'farcing' being the substantial number of intervening ancestors required to link the Milesian pedigree to the biblical Gomer son of Japheth son of Noah (ch. 2, 2; see the table in Scowcroft, 1988, 16). This process was presumably applied quite liberally to the large part of the genealogical corpus covering the period prior to the later sixth and earlier seventh century, when a broadly reliable system of contemporary written documentation seems to have come into being as in the analogous case of the annals.

As well as sheer invention, favoured methods of farcing seem to have included duplication (O'Rahilly, 1946, 202-3), the abstraction of eponymous ancestors from a people's name (Mac Niocaill, 1972, 3) and the incorporation of euhemerised pagan deities such as Lug and Núadu (O'Rahilly, ibid., 262; see *Corp. Gen.*, index). However, it seems most unlikely that the presence of such divinities in a given pedigree served to "give explicit expression to the association between deity and tribal groupment" (Mac Cana, 1983, 20), a fundamental relationship commonly supposed to underly the names of certain 'archaic' population groups (Mac Niocaill, ibid., 3-4) as well as the oath formula *tongu do día toinges mo thúath* "I swear to the god to whom my tribe swear" in sagas (e.g. Mac Cana, ibid., following Vendryes).

A major prop of this interpretation has been undermined by Ruairí Ó hUiginn's recent careful study of this formula's syntax and textual development, from which he convincingly concludes that it must be understood as "I swear to God what my people swear" and that "the god in question is the God of christianity" (1989, 339). Similarly there is no need to suppose that the value of figures like Lug and Núadu for monastic compilers of genealogies went much beyond their usefulness as royal stuffing, and it seems quite inconceivable that they could have ascribed any legitimating function to the presence in a pedigree of pagan deities as such.

Be that as it may, endeavours to winnow fact from fiction, genuine pagan elements from inventive padding and so on in the earlier sections of extant genealogies seem largely pointless in the absence of proper controls. The real issue, surely, is the contemporary purpose of genealogies and the way in which this affected their transmission and manipulation.

2. It is a commonplace of modern anthropological studies of genealogy in so-called 'primitive' or 'traditional' societies, whether illiterate or, like early Christian Ireland, partially literate, that its primary function is to legitimise current socio-political relationships and concerns by mirroring them. As Vansina puts it in a purely oral context, "genealogies are sources in which distortions are very prone to occur, because they form the ideological framework with reference to which all political and social relationships are sustained and explained. Because of the functions they fulfil, they undergo many alterations, and are frequently telescoped" (1973, 153).

Goody provides an illuminating actual example from his own field work: "the state of Gonja in northern Ghana is divided into a number of divisional chiefdoms, certain of which are recognized as providing the ruler of the whole nation. When asked to explain their system the Gonja recount how the founder of the state, Ndewura Jakpa, came down from the Niger Bend in search of gold, conquered the indigenous inhabitants of the area and enthroned himself as chief of the state and his sons as rulers of its territorial divisions. At his death the divisional chiefs succeeded to the paramountcy in turn. When the details of this story were first recorded at the turn of the present century, at the time the British were extending their control over the area, Jakpa was said to have begotten seven sons, this corresponding to the number of divisions whose heads were eligible for the supreme office by virtue of their descent from the founder of the particular chiefdom. But at the same time as the British had arrived, two of the seven divisions disappeared, one being deliberately incorporated in a neighbouring division because its rulers had supported a Mandingo invader, and the other because of some boundary changes introduced by the British administration. Sixty years later, when the myths of state were again recorded, Jakpa was credited with only five sons and no mention was made of the founders of the two divisions which had since disappeared from the political map" (1968, 33).

Such factors making for rapid change mean that little credence can be attached by the modern historian to such 'genuine' oral genealogy as may be assumed to have found its way into the early Irish written record, even if these constituents could be isolated with any confidence. Thus Mac Niocaill remarks of the eponymous ancestor of the Uí Néill dynasties associated with the prestigious Tara monarchy throughout the early medieval period: "in all, Niall is credited with fourteen sons. In a period

when polygyny was acceptable there is nothing remarkable about this, and it is only when one meets such feats of fertility as the thirty-three sons credited to Cathaír Már, allegedly ancestor . . . of the ruling dynasty of the Laigin, that cautious scepticism may yield to incredulity. But it is worth raising the question, even if it is unanswerable, whether all these links with Niall are not perhaps fictitious; whether, indeed, although some recent writers have accepted his existence, and seen in him the first king of Tara of his line, he ever existed at all, and if he did, whether he ever ruled in Tara" (1972, 12).

Whether or not Níall Noígíallach actually existed and sired fourteen sons, more or less, the claim that each of these managed to found dynasties of at least local importance surely stretches credulity, and this disbelief is encouraged by serious discrepancies in the sources regarding the number of sons ascribed to genealogical linchpins like him and Cathàer.

For instance, the opening of *Esnada Tige Buchet* gives the latter a full complement of thirty-two sons in two manuscripts as against a mere twelve in the third, while only seven appear on the subsequent list naming them. Leinster genealogies variously grant him thirty-three or thirty sons, but claim that only ten of these left issue, the groups claiming descent from each then being enumerated (*Corp. Gen.*, 42-3, 44-5). This looks like a rationalization reflecting a reduction in the number of groups felt worthy of mention in the pedigree (cf. Ó Corráin, 1978, 33-4), and nicely illustrates the constraints to which a written genealogical record of some depth is liable. In an essentially oral tradition the ancestors of lines that later became extinct or insignificant might easily fall victim to total 'structural amnesia' as in the Ghanaian example above, but in a literate milieu less forthright discarding methods may be appropriate in order to ease conflicts with a tangible older record.

This process may, of course, also operate the other way round, Byrne giving the following documented example of Níall's unorthodox acquisition of a fifteenth son: "typical of the manner in which genealogies were manipulated to accord to changed political circumstances is the fact that some authorities treat the Ua Dublaige dynasty of Fir Thulach Mide as a branch of their Ua Máelshechlainn overlords, while another traces their descent from a totally fictitious eponym Fer Tulach son of Níall Noígiallach" (1973, 143). Similar accretion by a process similar to "the adoption and full genealogical assimilation of clients" observable, for instance, in the southern Sudan (Lewis in Goody, 1968, 273) may, of course, also have applied at earlier stages in the development of the Uí Néill pedigree, and might account for the discrepancy between the mere eight sons named in *Timna Néill* "Níall's Testament" (*Corp. Gen.*, 131-2) and the fourteen usually ascribed to him (e.g. ibid., 133). However, the smaller number may well reflect a similar narrowing of focus upon the main lineages to that in the Leinster record, the so-called *secht fini Temra* or "seven Tara lineages" (with an at least theoretical claim on the kingship?) being listed virtually identically as eight elsewhere (ibid., 358 = *LL*.318b47-9, but note the absence of Fíachu and the resolution of Crimthann [= Conall Cremthainne] into the eponymous Áed Sláine and Colmán descended from him). There is also mention of a still more select "four Tara lineages" (ibid., 17), presumably the Cenél Conaill, Cenél nÉogain, Síl nÁedo Sláine and Clann Cholmáin dominant in the historical period.

The use of genealogy to make political statements is as characteristic of the supremely literary Bible as it is of truly oral cultures. Goody, for examples, states

that "like the Bedouin Arabs and the Hebrews of the Old Testament, the Tiv people of Nigeria give long genealogies of their forebears, which in this case stretch some twelve generations in depth back to an eponymous founding ancestor. Neither these genealogies, nor the biblical lists of the descendants of Adam, were remembered purely as feats of memory. They served as mnemonics for systems of social relations. When on his deathbed Jacob delivered prophecies about the future of his twelve sons, he spoke of them as the twelve tribes of Israel. It would seem from the account in Genesis that the genealogical tables here refer to contemporary groups rather than to dead individuals; the tables presumably serve to regulate social relations among the twelve tribes of Israel in a manner similar to that which has been well analysed in Evans-Pritchard's work (1940) on the Nuer of the southern Sudan and Fortes' (1945) account of the Tallensi of northern Ghana" (ibid., 31-2).

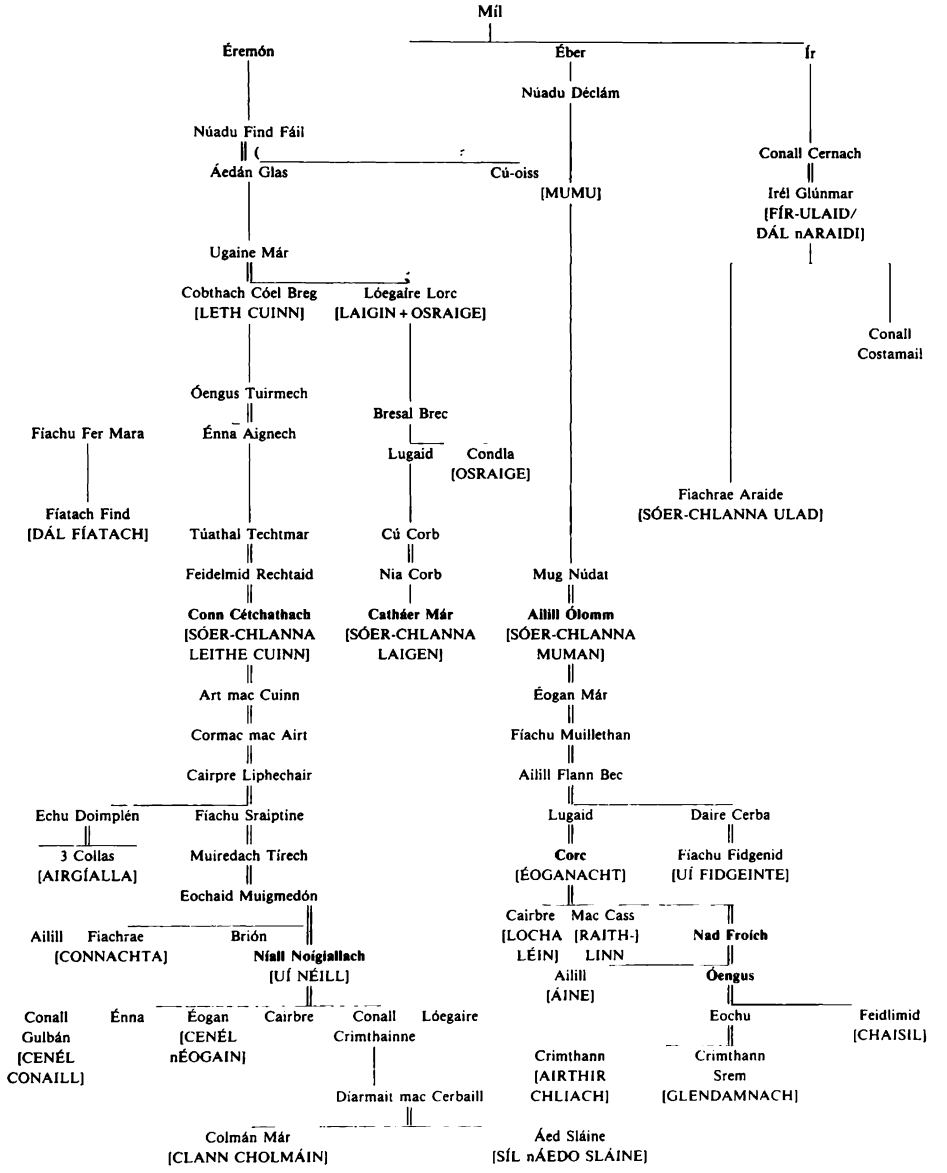
As has already been pointed out (ch. 2, 2), both the *timnae* or "testament" genre, whereby a father assigns his sons their various fortunes, and the two main methods of representing genealogical relationships in the monastically compiled early Irish corpus conform to, and may well have been modelled upon, familiar biblical patterns. It thus appears that in this fundamental area, as in so many other departments of early Irish literature discussed in previous chapters, modes of thought and presentation with likely enough pagan oral roots were fitted by assimilation to biblical and other ecclesiastical norms for a role in an emergent syncretistic literary *senchus* firmly under the Church's control (cf. the end of ch. 3, 13).

3. It has already been pointed out (ch. 3, 8) that the key socio-political distinction between inferior *aithech-thúatha* or "vassal peoples" and their betters was expressed genealogically by making the latter descend from Míl of Spain, whereas the former were ascribed to defeated Fir Bolg stock. So desirable was a Milesian pedigree that it was acquired by more and more groups as they sought to jettison their Fir Bolg status with its demeaning 'Canaanite' connotations (ch. 3, 8). Whether or not this led to a partial genealogical redefinition of the dichotomy between the tributary and non-tributary kingdoms of a province in terms of *fortúatha* "dependent kingdoms" and *sóer-chlanna* "free lineages", the basic situation in the early medieval period was that "the dominant tribe or dynasty of a province was normally itself split into several kingdoms. Under the developed dynastic polity of the Old Irish period kings who belonged to the same dynasty as the high king of a province acknowledged his suzerainty indeed by accepting *rath* or *tuarastal*, but paid no tribute. In the *Book of Rights* such kingdoms are termed *sáer-thuatha*, as opposed to tribute-paying *dáer-thuatha*. In the genealogies kingdoms not ruled by members of the dominant dynasty of a province are commonly called *fortuatha* 'extern tribes'. It is difficult to distinguish these from the *aithech-thuatha* or 'unfree tribes'. While the word *aithech-thuatha* could be a derogatory term for tributary kingdoms, its more precise definition seems to relate to population groups which had lost real political status and were mere rent-paying communities without a real king" (Byrne, 1973, 45-6). In this situation, which may be regarded as a political correlate of the social trichotomy between free client (*sóer-chéile*), base client (*dóer-chéile*) and unfree vassal (*aithech* etc.; cf. Scowcroft, 1988, 59-60), genealogical affiliation to the free lineages would obviously be very desirable as a token of promotion from tributary status, where the privileged could be induced to concede it.

Since convenient political maps of early medieval Ireland are readily available in the book by Byrne just cited, it will suffice here to refer briefly to the most important divisions. The overkingship of Mumu or Munster symbolised by Cashel and chiefly competed for by the main Éoganacht dynasties corresponded closely enough to the area of the present-day province. The same held good for Connacht with its royal site at Crúachu and major dynasties of the Uí Ailella, the Uí Fiachrach dominant in the seventh century and the Uí Briúin dominant in the eighth and ninth. However, the Ulaid or Ulstermen were confined to the present-day counties of Down and Antrim, and the Laigin or Leinstermen to the southern half of the present-day province roughly below Dublin's river Liffey. The two most powerful Leinster dynasties in the historical period were the southerly Uí Cheinnselaig and the northerly Uí Dúnlainge, the latter of whom dominated the provincial kingship from the mid-seventh century onwards. The rest of the country came under the Tara kingship of the Uí Néill, supported by their Airgíalla subjects in present-day county Armagh and areas to its immediate North and West. The Uí Néill themselves fell geographically into two main groups. The Cenél Conaill of mid-Donegal were dominant among the Northern Uí Néill in the seventh century until outstripped by the Cenél nÉogain's expansion from Inishowen in northeast Donegal into the present-day counties of Derry and Tyrone. Among the Southern Uí Néill, centred upon the present-day midland counties of Meath, Westmeath and Longford, the eastern Síl nÁedo Sláine virtually monopolised the Tara kingship in the second half of the seventh century but had been supplanted by the western Clann Cholmáin in alternation with the northern Cenél nÉogain by the middle of the eighth. Another major political and geographical division of Ireland recognised in texts is that between a southern Leth Moga or "Mug's half" supposedly named after Mug Núadat and comprising Munster plus the Laigin, and a northern Leth Cuinn or "Conn's half" consisting of Connacht, Uí Néill and Airgíalla, with or without the Ulaid, and said to take its name from Conn Cétchathach.

The political dimension may be made quite explicit in tracts indicating which groups converge (*con(d):recat*) at particular points in a genealogy or which groups are descended from whom. The table opposite gives a massively simplified scheme based upon extant genealogies but pared down to focus attention upon the nodes, relationships and individuals featuring at various points in the remainder of this chapter. A double vertical line indicates a father-son relationship and a horizontal line links brothers, but many such collateral offshoots have been ignored. Single vertical lines, by contrast, are non-specific as to the number of intervening generations involved, which may be as high as twenty or thirty in the heavily pruned top half intended to present a very broad political canvass above the *sóer-chlanna* watershed. Thereafter more detailed genealogies are provided only for earlier defining stages of the most important conglomerates of Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga, namely those centring on the Uí Néill and the Éoganacht respectively. The Laigin, Airgíalla, Connachta and so on could, of course, have been similarly treated.

The following passage is a good textual example geared to the major divisions: "at Conn Cétchathach, then, are divided the free lineages (*sóer-chlanna*) of Leth Cuinn, and they are dependent peoples (*fortúatha*) of the descendants of Conn (*Síl Cuinn*) apart from that. At Catháer Már son of Feidelmid are divided the free lineages of the Laigin, and they are dependent peoples apart from that. At Ailill Ólomm are divided the free lineages of Munster, and they are dependent peoples


Míl
Éremón
Éber
Ír
Núadu Déclám
Núadu Find Fáil
Áedán Glas
Cú-oiss
[MUMU]
Conall Cernach
Irél Glúnmar
[FÍR-ULAID/
DÁL nARAIDI]
Ugaine Már
Cobthach Cóel Breg
[LETH CUINN]
Lóegaire Lorc
[LAIGIN + OSRAIGE]
Conall
Costamail
Óengus Tuirmech
Bresal Brec
Fiachu Fer Mara
Énna Aignech
Lugaid
Condla
[OSRAIGE]
Fiachrae Araide
[SÓER-CHLANNA ULAD]
Fíatach Find
[DÁL FÍATACH]
Túathal Techtmar
Cú Corb
Feidelmid Rechtaid
Nia Corb
Mug Núdat
Conn Cétchathach
[SÓER-CHLANNA
LEITHE CUINN]
Catháer Már
[SÓER-CHLANNA
LAIGEN]
Ailill Ólomm
[SÓER-CHLANNA
MUMAN]
Art mac Cuinn
Éogan Már
Cormac mac Airt
Fíachu Muillethan
Cairpre Liphechair
Ailill Flann Bec
Echu Doimplén
Fiachu Sraiptine
Lugaid
Daire Cerba
3 Collas
[AIRGÍALLA]
Muiredach Tírech
Corc
[ÉOGANACHT]
Fiachu Fidgenid
[UÍ FIDGEINTE]
Eochaid Muigmedón
Cairbre
[LOCHA
LÉIN]
Mac Cass
[RAITH-
LINN]
Ailill
Fiachrae
[CONNACHTA]
Brión
Níall Noígiallach
[UÍ NÉILL]
Nad Froích
Ailill
[ÁINE]
Óengus
Conall
Gulbán
[CENÉL
CONAILL]
Énna
Éogan
[CENÉL
nÉOGAIN]
Cairbre
Conall
Crimthainne
Lóegaire
Eochu
Feidlimid
[CHAISIL]
Crimthann
[AIRTHIR
CHLIACH]
Crimthann
Srem
[GLENDAMNACH]
Diarmait mac Cerbaill
Colmán Már
[CLANN CHOLMÁIN]
Áed Sláine
[SÍL nÁEDO SLÁINE]

apart from that. Two sons of Úgaine: Cobthach Cóel Breg from whom comes Leth Cuinn and Láegaire from whom come the Laigin. At Núadu Argatlám the Munstermen join the lineages of Úgaine (*fri clannaib Úgaine*). Núadu Argatlám [apparently here confused with Núadu Find Fáil] had two sons: Glass and Cú-oiss. Glass from whom come the Síl Cuinn and Dál Ríata and Ulaid and Laigin and men of Ossory (*Osraige*); Cú-oiss from whom come the Munstermen, moreover . . . At Níall Noígíallach all of the Uí Néill join, i.e. Conall [= Cenél Conaill] and Colmán [= Clann Cholmáin] and Éogan [= Cenél nÉogain] and Áed Sláne [= Síl nÁedo Sláine] and Tethba and Cairbre [= Cenél Cairbri] and Cenél nÉnna and Láegaire [= Cenél Lóegairi]. At Eochaid Muigmedón the Northern and Southern Uí Néill join the Connachta. At Cairbre Liphechair the Airgíalla join the Uí Néill and Connachta. At Feidelmid Rechtaid the Fothairt and Déissi Temrach and Déissi Muman and Corcu Roída join the lineage (*clann*) of Conn. At Óengus Tuirmech of Tara [i.e. some nineteen generations before Feidelmid] the royalty of the Ulaid and Scotland and the Érainn join the Uí Néill and those (others) we have mentioned. At Úgaine Már [i.e. some ten generations before Óengus] the Laigin and Osraige and Leth Cuinn join" (*Corp. Gen.*, 137).

Viewed from an essentially Uí Néill standpoint, there is evidently a broad correlation here between genealogical proximity and the basic political relationships applying in the early Christian period. To begin with, the various Uí Néill dynasties are brought under the aegis of their eponymous ancestor Níall Noígíallach, their further linkage to the main Connacht lineages is then defined by Níall's father Eochaid, and the Airgíalla are given a somewhat more distant relationship to their Uí Néill overlords. Further out still at the defining node of Feidelmid Rechtaid various subordinate Fothairt and Déissi peoples are incorporated, the Dál Fíatach royal stock of the generally hostile Ulaid being grafted on well back to complete the main Leth Cuinn inventory. Turning then to Leth Moga, the genealogy brings in the Laigin and their Osraige neighbours at a considerable remove, and finally the main Munster rivals of the Uí Néill. Similar pecking orders are, of course, liable to be established within a province's main lineages, Ó Corráin remarking, for instance, of his tabular summary of the main Munster relationships that "this schema most probably represents, not the strictly historical ancestry of the various dynasties of the Eóganacht but the political affiliations amongst them as seen by an eighth-century genealogist" (1972, 175).

The genealogical framework presented above is unusual in that the chief Munster stock is separated from the rest some generations after the Milesian invasion, whereas standard practice was to trace their descent from Míl's son Éber, that of the Ulster Dál nAraide from his son Ír, and that of the main lineages of Leth Cuinn and the Laigin from his son Éremón. For example, "at Érimón there converge (*cond:recat*) the three Connachta and the Southern Uí Néill and the Northern Uí Néill and the Airgíalla and the Dési and the Laigin and the Osraige and the Érainn and the Orbraige and the Fothairt and Dál Ríata and Dál Fíatach and the royalty of Scotland . . . At Éber there converge the seven Éoganachta and the Lemnaig of Scotland. At Ír there converge the descendants of Fergus and Conall and Celtchar . . " (*Corp. Gen.*, 358). The ambiguous position of the Laigin as geographically part of Leth Moga but genealogically affiliated to Éremón's predominantly Leth Cuinn line (cf. Scowcroft, 1988, 47) in this, the usual arrangement, neatly reflects their intermediate geographical and political position between two powerful

neighbours, Munster and the Uí Néill, against each of whom in turn they had to fight major battles in 735 and 738 A.D., for example (*AU*; cf. ch. 1, 7).

Scowcroft has made the point that the *Lebor Gabála*'s scheme of the pre-Christian Tara kings of Ireland shows a deliberately analogous pattern of hiving off "according to which the principal line of descent from Éremón to Loegaire mac Néill enjoys a sovereignty interrupted three times and shared in each of the four eras with a cadet branch from which descend the kings of a *cóiced*. Thus the descendants of Éremón and Éber (whence the kings of Munster) share the sovereignty until the *flaithius Ulad* (descendants of Ír mac Míled), which lasts for seven generations (or 100 years) between the reigns of Núadu Find Fáil (XXXI) and Úgaine Mór (LVI). Two of the latter's many children, Cobthach Coel Breg (LVIII) and Loegaire Lorc (LVII, whence the Laigin and Osraige), establish dynasties that share the sovereignty until a *cess* ('debility') that afflicts them between the reigns of Énna Aignech (LXXIII) and Eochu Feidlech (LXXXII). Thereafter, the descendants of Énna and his brother, Fiachu Fer Mara (whence the Ulidian kingdoms of medieval Ireland and Scotland), share the sovereignty until the slaying of Fiachu Findoilches (or Find-folaid, XCIII) by the provincial kings (*cóicedaig*). His son, Tuathal Techtmar (XCV), reconquers Ireland, and from him descend the Airgíalla, the Connachta, and the Uí Néill. The Airgíalla never control the kingship of Tara - surviving only as *tuatha* tributary to the Uí Néill - but tract V portrays it as shared by the descendants of Níall Noígíallach (CXIV) and of Fiachrae (whence the Connachta), sons of Eochu Muigmedón" (ibid., 46-7; see table and map, 48 and 50).

4. Both genealogical schemes given above are broadly similar apart from the position of the Munstermen, who were ascribed in the first to Éremón's line by making Cú-oiss the son of a Núadu descended from him rather than of Éber's great-great-grandson Núadu Déclám (*Corp. Gen.*, 251 = Rawl. 154b23-8) and by superimposing Glas son of Núadu Déclám (*Corp. Gen.*, 187 = Rawl. 147a26-7) upon the Laginian Aedán Glas son of Núadu Find Fáil (e.g. *Corp. Gen.*, 6 = Rawl. 116a50-2). However, the real significance of this divergence lies in its connection with two conflicting views of Ireland's political organization.

One of these sought to assert Munster's integrity by claiming equal spheres of influence for the Éoganacht and the Uí Néill in the halves of Conn and Mug respectively: *diuissa est Hibernia insola in duas partes compares eter Conn Cétchathach et Éogan Már qui et Mug Núadat* "the island of Ireland was divided into two co-equal parts between Conn Cétchathach and Éogan Már, who was also Mug Núadat" (*Corp. Gen.*, 206). This eponymous partition was then traced right back to the two immigrant Milesian brothers Éber and Éremón, and corroborated by an equally fundamental genealogical separation of the Éoganacht from the Síl Cuinn. Furthermore, corresponding claims to ecclesiastical independence from the chief Uí Néill church of Armagh and her founder were based upon the allegedly pre-Patrician missions of certain southern saints, notably St. Ailbe of Munster's chief church Emly (cf. McCone, 1984b, 49-54; Sharpe, 1989). Finally, the recorded view of "others" that Éber was the eponym of Hibernia (*Corp. Gen.*, 186; ch. 3, 7) may be a vestige of Munster claims to overall hegemony. In this respect the entry of the southern-biased Annals of Inisfallen (*IF*) for 721 A.D. is worth noting for its unusual claim, at least in the context of the bulk of our extant materials, that "these are the five kings of the Munstermen who took (the kingship of) Ireland after the

faith (*íar cretim*), namely Óengus mac Nad Froích (+492, *AI*) and his son, i.e. Eochaid who ruled Ireland for seventeen years, and Cathal mac Finguine (+742, *AI*), and Feidlimid mac Crimthain (+847, *AI*) and Brían mac Cennétig (+1014, *AI*)". Finally, the Munster-biased tract *Do Búnad Imthechta Éoganachta* in the Laud genealogies insists upon the equal right of the kings of Cashel and Tara to "set a king over every kingdom (*túath*)" in Munster and Leth Cuinn respectively, but implies an honorific preeminence for Cashel by virtue of the asylum accorded by the Munster monarch Fíachu Muillethan to Cormac mac Airt after the latter's expulsion from the Tara kingship by the king of the Ulster Dál nAraidi. Indeed, it is claimed that Cormac, as an unmistakable gesture of submission, "gave him (Fíachu) hostages in return for a hosting of the Munstermen (*gíallais dó ar slógeth fer Muman*)", whereupon the forces of Leth Moga regained his throne for Cormac, who awarded Fíachu the Cíannachta lands in gratitude (Meyer, 1912, 314.6-16).

The influential alternative maintaining the Uí Néill king of Tara's supremacy in tandem with Armagh can be traced at least as far back as the seventh century. In Byrne's words, "Muirchú's *Life* of Patrick depicts fifth-century Tara as the Irish Babylon, a druidic centre which is a fitting stage-setting for his rhetorical narrative of the saint's confrontation with Lóeguire, that *rex quidam magnus, ferox, gentilisque imperator barbarorum regnans in Temoria, quae erat caput Scotorum* (a certain great, fierce, pagan emperor of the barbarians reigning in Tara, which was the capital of the Irish). He also asserts that Lóeguire's father Niall was 'founder of the royal line of almost all this island', (*origo stirpis regiae huius pene insulae*). Muirchú's contemporary Adomnán categorically states that Niall's great-grandson Diarmait mac Cerbaill was 'ordained by God ruler of all Ireland', (*totius Scotiae regnatorem a deo ordinatum*), and he tells of the warning given by Colum Cille to Diarmait's son Aed Sláine against embruing his hands in the blood of his kindred, lest he lose 'the prerogative fore-ordained to you by God of the monarchy of the kingdom of all Ireland' (*tibi a deo totius Euerniae regni praerogatiuam monarchiae praedestinatam*). Such high-flown language testifies to ambition rather than achievement. At this date neither the Ulaid nor the Laigin had acquiesced in subordinate status, and the kings of Cashel took little cognisance of northern affairs. Muirchú was writing in the interests of Armagh, perhaps to wean the Uí Néill from their attachment to the paruchia of their own saint Colum Cille, and certainly to link the mission of Patrick with their own ancestral figures. The primacy which Armagh won by the end of the seventh century was largely due to the success of this new alliance, but it would remain precarious until supported by a parallel secular institution. The prerogatives of the abbot of Armagh, as set out in the *Liber Angueli* were modelled on those of an as yet theoretical high-king of Ireland. As for Adomnán, he was himself a member of the Uí Néill dynasty of Cenél Conaill" (1973, 255).

The standard lists of *ríg Erenn* or "kings of Ireland" in the genealogies and *Lebor Gabála* are obviously intended to bolster these claims. To begin with, they represent the Tara kingship as a truly national monarchy held at one time or another by ancestors of all the major provincial dynasties in the manner described by Scowcroft earlier. This, however, leads up to claims of an Uí Néill monopoly or near-monopoly of it from the coming of Patrick in the fifth to the rise of Brían Bóruma in the late tenth century. These emerge clearly from the list of believing kings introduced with the words "and it is to be realised that no king of any descent but Níall's has held Ireland after Patrick's arrival with two exceptions, namely Báetán

and Brían reigned. But yet some do not count Báetán among the great kings" (*Corp. Gen.*, 124). Presumably the less diffuse variant genealogy merging the Munstermen with the rest some generations after Míl's invading sons is likewise geared to the doctrine of a Tara high kingship of all Ireland in Éremon's line developed by Uí Néill propagandists.

Unexceptionable though Byrne's comments above are as a statement of Armagh's ambitions and incipient rise to power, doubts may be entertained as to how fully she had established herself even as the main Uí Néill church by the late seventh century (Herbert, 1988, 52-5), and her broadly conceded primacy of Ireland was certainly still a century or more in the future at that time (McCone, 1984 and 1982, 136-44). This seems to have gained acceptance in the southern half with the help of a roughly late eighth-century change in Armagh strategy "from the simple claims to episcopal and other major churches made in the *Book of the Angel* in the mid-seventh century to a more flexible policy allowing some such churches virtual independence in their own spheres of influence in return for at least a nominal acknowledgement of Armagh and Patrick's primacy in Ireland as a whole" (McCone, 1984b, 52). There are two particularly good examples of such status being delegated by Patrick as *primus inter pares*. The first is the rider appended at the end of the Book of the Angel whereby Patrick (on behalf of Armagh) grants Brigit (representing Kildare) control over her federation of churches (*paruchia*) in Leinster in return for their cession to Armagh elsewhere (Bieler, 1979, 190-1; McCone, 1982, 107 and 144). The second is inserted at par. 29 of Ailbe of Emly's Salamanca Life (Heist, 1965, 125) and depicts the Munster saint meeting Patrick in king Óengus mac Nad Froích's company at Cashel and being made father of "all the men of the Munstermen" by Armagh's founder (McCone, 1984b, 52-3). It seems likely that a similar primacy of honour falling well short of real control eventually came to be accorded the Tara kingship even in Munster ideology, whence the overwhelming consensus on this basic point in the extant texts.

It thus emerges that even in the more remote prehistoric sections underpinning this "elaborate origin-legend embracing all the tribes and dynasties of the country" (Ó Corráin, 1978, 35) the genealogical record and associated king-lists were firmly geared to current political considerations, both ecclesiastical and secular.

5. This framework was taking shape "as early as the seventh century" and may be said to reflect the centripetal nation-moulding efforts "of a mandarin class of monastic and secular scholars whose privileged position in society allowed them to transcend all local and tribal boundaries" (ibid.). However, such trends towards homogenization were to some extent counterbalanced by more local political biases and the tyranny of change itself, factors inevitably conducive to a measure of diversity. Indeed, a cursory glance at *Corp. Gen.* will show that even highly edited tracts (Ó Corráin, 1978, 32-3) are characterised by discrepancies, some apparently trivial and others highly significant, both within a single manuscript or between different manuscript versions. The handful of instances already discussed, including the occasional mention in a text of alternative views, need not be multiplied here, and there is no reason to ascribe this variation to the vagaries of secular oral tradition.

The fact is that the senior personnel of monasteries great and small was prone to be connected by mutually beneficial ties of birth, geographical proximity or both with major and minor dynasties (cf. McCone, 1984b, 56-7). As Ó Corráin points out

with appropriate examples, "the church establishment of the eighth and ninth centuries and before was rich, comfortable and powerful. By now, clerical and lay society had become so intermeshed that any attempt to distinguish the traditional categories of church and state does some violence to the evidence . . . Already, Armagh and the Uí Néill kings were working in tandem, each it would seem content to boost the pretensions of the other. In Leinster, the monastic town of Kildare can quite properly be regarded as a dynastic capital in the ninth century, though of course its connections with the Uí Dúnlainge dynasty . . . were intimate even in the seventh century, when Cogitosus, the biographer of the foundress, describes Kildare as a great and metropolitan *civitas* where the treasures of kings were kept . . . In the case of Emly, . . . two, if not three of its abbots, held the kingship of Munster in the ninth century. A Munster king-list, edited at Emly, stresses the participation in the kingship of Munster of the dynastic stock which dominated its area and supplied many of its abbots (Meyer, 1913, 478-9, 482). A general principle can be stated in regard to abbatial succession though as we shall see some modifications will be required: the great hereditary clerical families were usually discard segments of royal lineages, pushed out of the political struggle and forced to reprise themselves in the church. Once established there, they proved extremely tenacious and were displaced by later royal segments or by new and expansive dynasties only with the greatest difficulty" (1981, 327-8).

The socio-political or even family concerns shared by the monastic keepers of a genealogy and the secular dynasty to which it referred (ibid., 329-31) doubtless helped to promote local interests as well as the intermeshing of lay and ecclesiastical, kingly and saintly pedigrees in individual compilations reflecting a very practical *comuaim n-ecalsa fri túaith* or "joining of church with kingdom" (ch. 1, 11). This interpenetration is confirmed by general statements to the effect that the same basic genealogical rules apply equally to both estates, e.g. "all, both saints and kings (*eter nóebu ⁊ rígu*), whose genealogy is not traced to Conn are *fortúatha*" (*Corp. Gen.*, 358 = *LL.* 318c5) or "Níall Noígíallach, Catháer Már son of Feidlimid, Fíachra Araide [Ulaid, Dál nAraidi], Ailill Ólomm, these are the four noble pillars to which are traced the genealogies of the high kings (*ard-rig*) and noble people (*deg-dóene*) and superior saints (*úasal-nóeb*) of Ireland and all the well born (*so-chenélach*) of Ireland" (ibid., = 318b29-31). Obviously both lay and ecclesiastical political issues can be expected to figure in the different intertwined branches of a monastically based *senchus* or 'tradition' consisting of the "literary and highly conventionalised products of specialist learned classes, retainers of the contemporary holders of power, who were at pains to legitimise all change by giving it the sanction of immemorial custom and who ruthlessly reshaped the past to justify the present" (Ó Corráin, 1978, 12).

6. As far as the basic means of articulating these is concerned, "it has become increasingly clear that saints' Lives, like other branches of early Irish tradition such as sagas and genealogies, are first and foremost documents of their own time of composition, social and political propaganda that makes use of traditional materials in a kind of code" (McCone, 1984, 306). Primary importance consequently attaches to "the contemporary aims of the composition in question, however historically remote the figures and events it purports to describe were supposed to be. The key to such interpretation of saints' Lives and similar material is to realize that a

particular saint essentially represents his main foundation and prominent laymen, particularly kings, the dynasties tracing descent from them in this narrative code, which makes it possible to cast the driest of political claims in the form of a good story about people" (ibid.).

This principle is, of course, well illustrated by the brief examples near the end of section 4 above, where the spheres of influence agreed by Armagh with Kildare and Emly are justified by stories of Patrick's friendly personal dealings with Brigit and Ailbe. Similarly the record in the Book of Armagh's *Additamenta* of Áed of Sletty's seventh-century submission of his Leinster church, linked to the Uí Cheinnselaig and founded by Fíacc, to Armagh during Ségéne's abbacy (par. 16; ch. 4, 3) is directly preceded by a justificatory tale rather obviously produced for the occasion despite being set in the fifth century (pars. 13-4; Bieler, 1979, 176-7). This individualises the new relationship between the two monasteries and projects it right back to the alleged beginnings of Christianity in Leinster by telling of Fíacc's ordination as bishop by Patrick, who then marks out and consecrates the Sletty site for him on land granted out of gratitude for baptism at Patrick's hands by king Crimthann son of Énna Cennsalach, eponymous ancestor of the Uí Cheinnselaig.

Further typical hagiographical personalizations of inter-church relations include some striking Airgíalla examples: "their Lives and genealogies indicate for Tigernach of Clones and Éogan of Ardstraw (a mere thirty miles further north) remarkable, not to say highly suspicious, similarities in background and early careers . . . This parallellism between Tigernach and Éogan is made quite explicit time and again in the latter's Life, whereas there is no mention of Éogan in the life of Tigernach. Nevertheless, the same basic framework can be observed in both . . . The most probable explanation of these clearly deliberate parallels and associations in our two Lives is that the churches of Clones and Ardstraw had discovered a considerable measure of common ground politically, at least by the time that the core of Éogan's Life came to be written . . . At all events, both Lives stress the Leinster orientation of their subjects and, by implication, their churches, and completely ignore Patrick in a manner suggesting that neither Clones nor Ardstraw contemplated submission to Armagh's claims at the time of composition. Indeed, resistance to Armagh pressure would provide motive enough for an alliance that may also have included the church of Coleraine in Dál nAraide territory just beyond the north-eastern fringe of Airgíalla, to judge from the claim in Éogan's Life (chap. 2) that Cairbre, 'subsequently bishop and founder of the monastery of Coleraine', was a 'fellow disciple' at Candida Casa with Tigernach and Éogan, whose abduction to and subsequent release from Gaul he shared" (McCone, 1984, 307-8).

This hypothesis is corroborated by references in Tírechán indicative of rivalry and disagreement between Armagh and the aforementioned churches (ibid., 308-9). On the other hand, in addition to a hint in Tírechán, both the Tripartite Life of Patrick and Mac Cairthinn's acephalous Salamanca Life stress the latter's subordination to Patrick at the foundation of Clogher, thus creating a "balance of probability that Clogher, unlike Clones and Ardstraw, was counted a Patrician church, i.e. connected with Armagh from at least the later seventh century when Muirchú wrote" (ibid., 310). The respective fortunes of pro-Armagh Clogher and anti-Armagh Clones may well have swung with the pendulum of the local Uí Chremthainn dynasty's fluctuating relations with Armagh and her Uí Néill backers (ibid., 311-3).

At any rate, the following episodes seem to use past monastic and dynastic founders in a typically coded reference to a roughly contemporary tense situation in which Clogher apparently succeeded in maintaining its status as the dynasty's chief church despite at least one attempt to thrust Clones to the fore: "in the Life of Mac Cairthinn the saint is told by Patrick to establish his church 'in the plain before the royal seat of Airgíalla' . . . The Uí Chremthainn ancestor king Echu . . . is hostile to Mac Cairthinn but the saint's power eventually brings about his submission, rather as Patrick overcomes the reluctant Lóegaire of Tara in Muirchú's narrative. When Tigernach arrives in Airgíalla in chapter twelve of his Life, the same king Echu, who is his maternal grandfather according to the beginning of the Life, offers him the seat and dignity of bishop Mac Cairthinn . . . and promises to expel the said bishop in his favour. The virtuous Tigernach rejects this in horror and withdraws in the direction of a distant mountain, where he stays for a long time in a church . . . that he founded" (ibid., 313-4). Also noteworthy is the Clones-biased Life's implication, most likely disingenuous, that Mac Cairthinn and hence Clogher were in the debt of Tigernach and hence Clones for not acceding to this plan.

Tigernach's Leinster connections mentioned above are accentuated in his Life to the extent that it is "quite deferential to Kildare, in marked contrast to the attitude it shows towards Armagh, and makes considerable claims for Brigit and her church. Brigit herself is made a decisive influence on Tigernach's career, being responsible for his baptism, ordination as bishop and mission to Airgíalla. When one saint performs such services as these, especially episcopal ordination, for another in saints' Lives, the explanation usually seems to be that the text in question is claiming the beneficiary's foundation or foundations for the benefactor's *paruchia*, a procedure particularly apparent in Tírechán's work on Patrick. Accordingly it looks as if Clones is here acknowledging a degree of subordination to Kildare" (ibid., 321).

The question as to why this should be so brings us back to the case of Sletty alluded to near the beginning of this section: "situated as it was on the middle Barrow, Sletty was close to the northern limits of Uí Cheinnselaig territory and not far from the large area to the North controlled by their powerful dynastic rivals the Uí Dúnlainge and their main church of Kildare. Since this was precisely the period when Kildare was vigorously pressing primatial claims with Cogitosus as her mouthpiece, Sletty's submission to Armagh and incorporation into her *paruchia* was surely aimed at bolstering her position against strong pressure from her northern neighbour Kildare and her backers. Accordingly the principle behind the 'Sletty syndrome' seems simply to be: if a powerful church nearby is threatening your independence, protect yourself by submission to a powerful church further away whose control is likely to be less pervasive and irksome. This, I take it, is precisely what Clones did, Armagh being the powerful neighbour and Kildare the more distant power in a kind of mirror image of the Sletty situation" (ibid., 323; cf. ch. 4, 3).

This section may be fittingly concluded with an example of Muirchú's use of biblical allusion (ch. 2, 3) to implant a congenial political message subversive of what, from Armagh's standpoint, must have been the rather unappealing surface implications of his account of Patrick's burial: "when, however, the angel came to him he gave him (Patrick) advice concerning burial: 'let two untamed oxen be chosen and let them proceed whither they will, bearing your body on a cart, and wherever they stop, a church will be built in honour of your body. And as the angel

had said, two unsteady bullocks were chosen and draw the cart (*plaustrum*) with the holy body placed on their shoulders at a steady pace (*stabili.. gestamine*), and from a place called Clogher, from the east of Findabair (in Co. Down?, see Hogan, 1910, 420, l.7) selection from Conall's cattle distinguished the oxen. And they went forth directed by God's will to Dún Lethglaisse (Downpatrick), where Patrick is buried" (II, 11 in Bieler, 1979, 120-1). Muirchú finishes by telling how two battles over the saint's remains between the Airthir of Armagh, a division of the Airgíalla, and the Ulaid, in whose territory Downpatrick was, were miraculously thwarted and peace restored (II, 13-4). These were probably identified with the "storming of Downpatrick (*expugnatio Dúin Leithglaisse*)" ascribed to the years 496 and 498 A.D. in *AU* shortly after Patrick's own death, traditionally dated to 493, although Muirchú may have been seeking to defuse more recent tensions.

Muirchú obviously modelled the episode of the cart drawn by cattle on the Old Testament account of the Philistine priests' recommendation for finding out whether or not God was responsible for the woes piled upon them after capturing the ark of the covenant from the Israelites: "now, therefore, set to and make a new cart (*plaustrum*) and yoke two milch kine, upon which no yoke hath been put, to the cart and shut up their calves at home. And ye shall take the ark of the Lord and lay it on the cart . . . and send it away, that it may go. And if it go up by the way of their own territories to Beth-she-mesh, He hath done us this great evil. But if not, at least we shall know that his hand hath not touched us but it hath happened by chance" (1 Sam./Kgs. 6:7-9). "Therefore, they did so . . . And the kine went straight on the way that leadeth to Beth-she-mesh and walked in unison (*itinere uno*), lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left . . . And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Beth-shemite, and stood there. Moreover, there was a great stone there . . . And the Levites took down the ark of the Lord . . . and put it on the great stone" (ibid.:10-15).

In view of the importance of a founder's relics as a means of bolstering a monastery's status in early medieval Ireland, Muirchú's apparently ready acquiescence in Armagh's embarrassing deficiency in this area is rather surprising at first sight (cf. McCone, 1982, 136-8). Although there is some amelioration in the claim that Patrick was on his way to his beloved Armagh to die until ordered by God's angel to return to Saul in return for certain privileges, Muirchú nevertheless clearly implies that Patrick's burial in Downpatrick was in accordance with God's will and that it is wrong for the Airthir to seek to recover his body by force. However, it does not necessarily follow that this was a permanent dispensation. Indeed, since the Bible informs us that the ark, far from remaining in Bethshemish forever, was eventually brought back to its proper home Jerusalem in the reign of king David (2 Sam./Kgs. 6), there is an obvious presumption that Muirchú deliberately echoed the biblical episode of the ark's journey to Bethshemesh as a means of suggesting that Patrick's remains were likewise ultimately destined by God to return to Armagh in accordance with the saint's original wish.

Decoded in this way, at first sight naive hagiographical narratives about alleged persons and events in the missionary period and its immediate aftermath often prove to be precise and subtly nuanced justificatory treatises on contemporary, in this instance roughly seventh- and eighth-century, issues and power struggles. As further examples below will show, the indisputably monastic authors of Irish saints' Lives in Latin were as acutely alive to secular as to ecclesiastical politics, and it is no

surprise to discover similar aptitudes and concerns informing their endeavours in the field of vernacular saga.

7. Needless to say, a good deal more than mere attractive presentation was involved in cases like this. Although able to endow a narrative with political backbone, genealogical information alone can hardly go beyond the basic relationships expressible in terms of collateral affinity, matrimonial connection, generational distance, sibling seniority or lack of offspring. The addition of even brief snatches of narrative detail can put badly needed flesh on these bones and significantly enhance a genealogy's articulatory potential through a wider range of relationships and extra nuances of attitude or behaviour. It is thus no surprise to find the relevant genealogical set-up introducing a saga like *Cath Maige Mucrama* or to find quite substantial narratives inserted in genealogies at suitable points, for instance the brief account of Creidne and her sons (ch. 9, 3) and the longer tale of the three Collas in the Rawlinson B. 502 collection (*Corp. Gen.*, 154 and 147-52) or the whole of *Scéla Éogain ⁊ Chormaic* and *Do Bunad Imthechta Éoganachta* amidst the Laud genealogies (Meyer, 1912, 309-12 and 312-4).

The marginality of Creidne and her sons, ancestors of the Conaille Muirthemne, whose expulsion from their patrimony, conflict and eventual accommodation with their father, Conall Costamail, led to the latter's prophecy that the new lands granted to them would be theirs forever despite the destruction and forced migration of other Ulaid, has been explained as follows by Ó Corráin: "Conaillne Muirthemne, whose royal line apears in the annals towards the end of the seventh century, were a people settled in the Louth region. They are regarded by the genealogists and historians (probably rightly) as a kingdom which formed an integral part of the historic overkingdom of the Ulaid (Ulster). By the eighth century, however, they were of Ulaid but not in it, for the Ulaid had lost heavily to the expanding Uí Néill and the Conaillne came to form a buffer state between the Uí Néill, Airgíalla and Ulaid. The text explains why and how this situation came about. Origin-legends and ancestral aetiologies of these kinds occur at nodal points in the historical record - points of departure, replacement, conquest" (1985, 83).

Another such nodal point, which hives the subject Airgíalla off from the main Uí Néill and Connachta stock in conjunction with the conquest of Ulaid territory foretold by Conall above, is covered by the story of the three Collas, sons of Eochu Doimplén and each the defining ancestor of a major Airgíalla people. This tells how they committed the heinous crime of *fin-gal* "kin-slaying" against their paternal uncle, the king of Tara Fíachu Sraiptine (son of Cairbre Liphechair son of Cormac mac Airt etc.), out of jealousy at the burgeoning prospects of Fíachu's son and eventual successor Muiredach Tírech (father of Eochaid Muigmedón father of Níall Noígíallach). This is the politically crucial factor invalidating any claim upon the Tara kingship by themselves or their descendants: *conid hí in fingal sin ro:scar flaithius nÉrenn fri clainn Echach Dompliúin .i. frisna Collaib* "so that that kinslaying is what separated the sovereignty of Ireland from the descendants of Eochu Doimplén, namely the Collas" (*Corp. Gen.*, 147, 142a23-4; cf. St. Colum Cille's warning to Áed Sláine in 4 above). Fíachu, by contrast, secures the royal future of his ultimately Uí Néill descendants by choosing defeat for himself and the kingship for his progeny (*maidm fair féin ⁊ ríge dia chlannaib*, 142a48) in response to his druid's prediction: "I can (secure) victory for you, but this follows from it. If

you are victorious, you will perform kin-slaying upon your brother's sons and will yourself be king and there will never be a king descended from you. If, however, you are defeated, it will be from you that the sovereignty of Ireland will stem and there will never be a king of Ireland from the three Collas". After their dastardly deed the Collas flee to Scotland but later return and make their peace with Muiredach, who eventually awards them sword land (*tír claidib*, 142b15) to be duly conquered from the hostile Ulaid.

This narrative, then, grants the Airgíalla their lands through the good graces of a Tara monarch in the direct line of ascent from the Uí Néill, while depriving them of any claim upon that kingship because of a previous delinquency. In this way the main ingredients of the contemporary Uí Néill ideal of a cooperative but subordinate Airgíalla are clearly enunciated in conformity with the basically identical but necessarily vaguer implications of the bare genealogical scheme.

The point at which the Connachta are eclipsed by the Uí Néill as claimants to the Tara kingship is marked genealogically by Muiredach Tírech's son Eochaid Muigmedón and narratively by the adventure or *echtrae* of his sons summarised earlier (ch. 8, 2). This tells how Níall Noígíallach overcame the disadvantages of illegitimacy, youth and expulsion to surpass his older half-brothers Ailill, Fíachrae and Brión, eponymous ancestors of the main Connacht dynasties, in various tests aimed at determining who should succeed Eochaid as king of Tara. The first of these involving a druid's prediction of the boys' futures on the basis of the implements they carried from a burning smithy is also given at the appropriate point in the Rawlinson genealogies (*Corp. Gen.*, 131). The crucial successive encounters of the brothers with the woman of sovereignty in *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* show just how meticulous the narrative code's attention to detail could be. By sleeping with the initially hideous woman after his half-brothers had refused, Níall is guaranteed a virtual monopoly of the Tara sovereignty for himself and his descendants, but the tradition that two descendants of Fíachra, namely Nath Í and Ailill Molt, were also kings of Tara, is neatly acknowledged by having him give the hag a perfunctory kiss.

The motif of a youngest son getting the better of his older brothers is too widespread in folklore (cf. the Grimms' 'Golden bird' in ch. 5, 3 end) for influence from the biblical stories concerning Jephthah of Gilead and king David's anointing (ch. 8, 8) to be confidently posited here, although the possibility can hardly be discounted. At all events, there seems little doubt that monastic propagandists for the Uí Néill would have at least appreciated the welcome implications of the similarity with David especially, in view of his status as an ideal pre-Christian ruler over a united kingdom.

8. A recurrent synchronism in Patrician hagiography brings the saint into contact with the sons of the apical or defining ancestor of dynasties important at the time of writing. Presumably this pattern's appeal resided in the fact that "this was as far back as contact with Christianity could be pushed without denying it the respectable antiquity of origins in the pre-Christian period, and the second generation also had the advantage of allowing pointed contrasts in attitude towards the new faith and in political fortunes to be drawn between rival brothers, themselves often 'defining' ancestors of further groups within the major dynasty" (McCone, 1984b, 36).

For example, the very end of Tírechán's seventh-century memoire claims that

Patrick "ordained Fíacc the Fair in Sletty and baptized the sons of Dúnlang, and arose via Belut Gabráin and founded a church in Roigne Martorthige and he baptised the sons of Nad Fróech in the land of Munster on Cothrige's rock in Cashel" (51, 4; Bieler, 1979, 162-3). Dúnlang was, of course, the eponym of the northern Leinster Uí Dúnlainge who dominated the provincial kingship and abbacy from the early seventh century, while Nad Fróech was the defining ancestor of the most central Éoganacht branches of Áine, Airther Cliach, Glendamain and Cashel. In both instances Armagh was apparently hoping to wean these important dynasties away from their major churches, Armagh's rivals Kildare and Emly respectively. A similar situation more in tune with contemporaneous political realities occurs in the *Additamenta* passage about the foundation of Sletty already discussed (6 above), which represents Patrick as having baptised Crimthann son of Énna Cennsalach, eponymous ancestor of the southern Leinster Uí Cheinnselaig (14, 3; ibid., 176-7).

A more elaborately structured encounter of this kind takes place in Tírechán's work between Patrick and three of Níall Noígíallach's sons from whom significant Southern Uí Néill lines claimed descent (McCone, ibid., 54-5; Bieler, 1979, 132). At Tailtiu, site of the great Uí Néill *óenach* or "fair" (*agon regale*), the saint encounters the eponym of the Cenél Cairbri, who seem to have lost their position as the eastern Síl nÁedo Sláine's chief west midland rivals in the course of the seventh century (cf. Byrne, 1973, 84). This Cairbre proves to be an incorrigibly hostile pagan, who earns Patrick's curse for trying to kill him: "your seed shall serve the seed of your brothers and there shall be no king of your seed forever" (par. 9).

The second meeting on the site of Donaghpatrick (a few miles due west of Slane on the river Blackwater between Navan and Kells) is with the virtuous Conall, who "received him with great joy, and he baptised him and established his throne forever and said to him: 'the seed of your brothers will serve your seed forever, and you must render alms to my heirs after me forever, and your sons and (the sons) of your sons (must render) to my sons in the faith a perpetual due'. And he measured a church of sixty feet with his own feet for Patrick's God, and Patrick said: 'if this church be lessened, your reign shall not be long and secure'" (par. 10). This, of course, is Conall Cremthainne, ancestor of the Síl nÁedo Sláine, who virtually monopolised the Tara kingship during the second half of the seventh century. Since this dominance must have had an air of permanence when Tírechán and Muirchú wrote, Armagh had an obvious interest in establishing good and financially advantageous relations with this line while denigrating its main southern rivals.

Níall's third son, king Lóegaire of Tara, occupies an intermediate position in Tírechán "because he made a pact with him (Patrick) that he would not be killed in his kingdom, but could not become a believer" (par. 12). Muirchú's narrative, of course, centres upon a prolonged conflict between Patrick and Lóegaire, who is hostile to the saint and tries to kill him but is eventually forced rather against his will to accept the faith (I 15-21; Bieler, ibid., 84-99). At the end of this "holy Patrick said to the king: 'since you have resisted my teaching and have been an obstacle to me, although the days of your reign shall be extended, yet shall there be no king of your seed forever'". Lóegaire's fate, then, is intermediate between those of Cairbre and Conall in line with his behaviour, whether as a friendly but recalcitrant pagan in Tírechán or as a murderous adversary turned reluctant convert in Muirchú. Reference has already been made to the significance of the struggle in Muirchú's narrative between the paschal fire lit by Patrick at Fertae Fer Feec (I 14,2), "i.e.

Slane or near it" (Hogan, 1910, 414), and the pagan fire of Lóegaire and his men at Tara as a symbol of the new religion's imminent triumph over the old (ch. 8, 10). The association of the victorious Christian fire with what was to become the monastery of Slane is not only comparable with the triumphant contrast in *Félire Óengusso*'s prologue (165-204) between prosperous monasteries and desolate nearby royal forts but can also be taken to connote the imminent eclipse of Lóegaire's lineage, the Cenél Lóegairi centred around Trim a few miles due east Tara, by Síl nÁedo Sláine, from whose territory around Donaghpatrick and Slane a little to the north of Tara Patrick's paschal beacon emanates. Needless to say, Tírechán and Muirchú's essentially identical message, conveyed somewhat differently by each of them, accurately reflected the current political situation.

Ancestral sibling rivalry was an obvious means of representing emnities between sub-sections of a broader lineage, and is duly used by the First Life of Brigit, compiled in the eighth century from seventh-century sources (cf. ch. 8, 3), to express the early hostility between Cenél Cairbri and Síl nÁedo Sláine already identified: "on that day Conall son of Níall came to holy Brigit as she walked on the road and said to her: 'O holy virgin Brigit, bless me diligently, lest my brother Cairbre, who hates me, kill me'. And Brigit said, 'I shall bless you. Let your group go in front, and we shall follow them. For it is not fitting for us to walk with them'. And when they were all climbing up the hill, one of Brigit's virgins said: 'Alack, Brigit, what shall we do? Behold, Cairbre is coming after us, and now those two brothers will kill each other'. Brigit said, 'not so shall our God act for us'. And when Cairbre had arrived, he said: 'O holy Brigit, bless me, since I fear my brother Conall in these places'. Then the two brothers passed over the hill at the same time, and did not recognise each other. God blinded their eyes, lest they recognise each other, on account of Saint Brigit. And Brigit blessed them, and Conall and Cairbre exchanged kisses without recognising each other. Each went off on his way, and all magnified God's name and Brigit in this miracle" (par. 62; Bollandus, 1658, 127).

The decline of Cenél Cairbri in the west midlands was matched by the rise there of Clann Cholmáin, whose alleged descent from an older brother of Áed Sláine's named Colmán Már presumably betokens their original status as allies or even a cadet branch of that eastern midland dynasty. However, the Cenél Cairbri's erstwhile role as major western rivals of Síl nÁedo Sláine soon devolved upon Clann Cholmáin, who by the middle of the eighth century had blocked Síl nÁedo Sláine off from an effective claim to the Tara kingship. This inevitably shifted the sibling rivalry motif to this part of the Southern Uí Néill genealogy, so that it was now the sons of Díarmait mac Cerbaill and their offspring rather than those of Níall Noígíallach himself who were at each other's throats. *Aided Díarmata* provides a nice example: "once Díarmait was in Tara feasting. Mugain daughter of Corcrad mac Duach of the Éoganacht Chaissil was beside him, i.e. the mother of Áed son of Díarmait, pregnant then with Áed Sláine. They then went out onto the green to refresh themselves in the company that was at the carousal. While they were there they saw Díarmait's grandson coming towards them on the green, namely Suibne son of Colmán, and a hundred horse was his company . . . As Suibne arrived at the assembly the woman's, namely Mugain's, womb screamed so that it was heard throughout the assembly. 'What is this, woman?' said Díarmait, 'is it upon the lad that your attention is?' 'You are not the prophet *(fáid)*,' said Becc mac Dé. 'There is a prophet with you'. 'You find out, then,' said Díarmait, 'since you are a prophet'.

'I know, indeed,' said Becc. 'The son who is in the woman's womb, it is he who will kill yon lad'. That was true. Áed Sláine killed Suibne. He left a son, namely Conall mac Suibni, and it is he who killed Áed Sláine in turn . . . So that is the first kin-slaying (*fin-gal*) between Clann Cholmáin and Síl nÁedo Sláine, namely Áed Sláine's killing of his nephew, namely Suibne mac Colmáin, and Conall's killing of him then" (O'Grady, 1892, 74-5).

Two interesting narratives validate key dynastic relationships in seventh-century Munster by means of a mother's vision establishing a pecking order among her offspring. In one of these, from a text concerning Conall Corc and the Corco Loígde, Corc of Cashel's wife Oíbfind dreamed she was a bird hatching chicks in a nest. Three flew to south Munster and one to the centre, while a bird came after them from the West and the fifth chick remained in the nest. A druid interprets this as a prophecy that she will bear five sons, Mac Caiss, Mac Brócc (and Mac Iair) being the trio that flew south, Daig the one in the middle, Cairbre Lúachra the later sixth and Nad Froích the one who stayed home (Meyer, Anecdota, 1910, 59.20-29). An equivalent version involving a litter of four pups bathed in wine (Nad Froích), ale (Mac Cas), fresh milk (Mac Brócc), and water (Mac Iair) respectively, plus an intrusive and vicious fifth bathed in blood (Cairbre Cruithnechán) has been translated earlier (ch. 5, 11).

Ó Corráin has remarked of "this text, which dates from the seventh century" that "apart from being an aetiology of the different branches of the Eóganacht, it is a legitimist document setting out the pre-eminent political claims of the Eóganacht Chaisil. Nad Froích, ancestor of the Eóganacht Chaisil (and of other sub-segments who also held the kingship) and Mac Cass, ancestor of Eóganacht Raithlind, are associated with wine and ale, the drinks of sovereignty. Their descendants, therefore, will hold the kingship, though those of Nad Froích will be pre-eminent. Mac Iair and Mac Brócc are associated with milk and water, evidently the symbols of the religious life, and from them descend the two leading hereditary ecclesiastical lineages of the Eóganacht, who ruled the great monastery of Cork . . . Eóganacht Locha Léin, the descendants of Cairpre Cruithnechán, are bloody interlopers, half-brothers only, and the descendants of a racially inferior Pictish woman . . . In fact, there was a fierce dynastic struggle in progress in the seventh century between the Eóganacht Locha Léin, on the one hand, and the other branches of the Eóganacht, on the other, and the text is a bitter and partisan expression of the views of the enemies of Eóganacht Locha Léin" (1985, 80).

The above narratives should give some indication of just how carefully genealogical relations, geographical locations, other attributes and symbols are combined by their monastic authors in order to convey with precision the desired political message, be it secular, ecclesiastical or both. Furthermore, intricate though they may be, such coded political statements by no means invariably constitute the sole or even central message of a narrative. Even in the frequent enough cases where they are palpably present, they quite often amount to only one level of discourse, however important, intermeshed with others geared to the sort of social, moral and religious concerns identified in previous chapters.

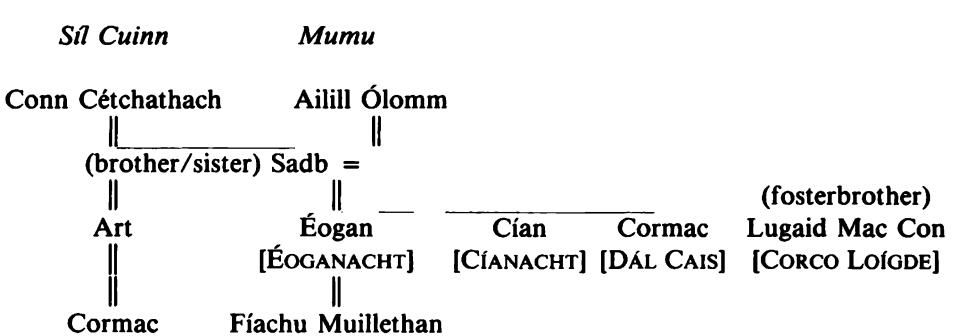
9. A marked tendency of monastic *senchus* already adumbrated in the foregoing was to create synchronisms and other parallelisms between corresponding nodes in different major genealogical lines. For example, bringing the sons of the apical

ancestors of major dynasties into contact with Saint Patrick (8 above) not only established explicit synchronisms at this level but also implied that Níall, Dúnlang, Énna Cennsalach and Nad Froích were coevals just before the arrival of Christianity. Due allowance must, of course, be made for local variation. For example, the synchronism of Níall of Tara with Nad Froích of Cashel implied by seventh-century Armagh and Uí Néill propagandists differs slightly from the early Munster text about Conall Corc referred to above, which makes Níall as eponymous ancestor of all the Uí Néill a contemporary of Corc, the defining forebear of the whole Éoganacht (Meyer, Anecdota, 1910, 58.19-20), rather than Nad Froích, ancestor of the central dynasties only. Nevertheless, the same basic type of parallelism is envisaged in both cases.

Bearing in mind that Níall and the eponyms of the chief Connacht dynasties were actually counted as half-brother and full brothers respectively, these synchronisms deliberately link the founders of the main dynasties of Leth Cuinn, the Laigin and Munster. Moreover, a similar link was established between the kings from whom the *sóer-chlanna* or free lineages of each of these great political entitites were supposed to be descended, namely Conn Cétchathach, Cathéer Már and Ailill Ólomm.

A genealogical account of the peaceful coexistence of Cathéer in Tara and Conn in Kells has already been translated as part of a discussion of how in *Esnada Tige Buchet* the now feeble old king Cathéer's inability to check his sons' selfish excesses drives Buchet the hospitaller and his fosterling, Cathéer's daughter Eithne Tháebfata, into the arms of Cormac mac Airt at Kells, a development deliberately juxtaposed with Cormac's permanent acquisition of the site of Tara through generosity towards Odrán (ch. 6, 11; cf. ch. 3, 3 and 11). Here a synchronism is established between Cathéer's sons and Cormac, the implication being that Conn's son Art rather than Conn himself was Cathéer's contemporary in this parable of the Laginian loss of Tara to the Uí Néill.

The saga *Cath Maige Mucrama* begins by establishing the following set of relationships and synchronisms, destined to prove crucial in the subsequent narrative, between leading figures in Leth Cuinn and Leth Moga:



The main sequences of offence and retribution in this tale are built around a quarrel between Éogan son of Ailill, eponymous ancestor of the Éoganacht, and his hitherto beloved fosterbrother, Lugaid Mac Con of the Corco Loígde in southwest Cork with their non-Milesian pedigree. Lugaid was defeated in battle and forced into a Scottish exile, but eventually returned at the head of large forces to take vengeance upon his persecutors. The allied kings of Munster and Tara, Éogan and

Art respectively, were slain in battle, Lugaid replacing the latter as king of Ireland until displaced by Art's son Cormac. Finally, Lugaid went to tend his fosterfather Ailill Ólomm, but was killed at his instigation in revenge for the battle of Mag Mucrama "in which fell Art son of Conn and Ailill's seven sons with the slaughter of the men of Ireland around them" (par. 76).

The genealogical correlation of Leth Cuinn's Art and Cormac with Leth Moga's Éogan and Fíachu is given significant narrative reinforcement in parallel but separate incidents the night before battle against Mac Con. In the first Éogan visits the blind druid Díl maccu Chrecga of Osraige, who realises that the king is doomed and offers him his own daughter Moncha's favours for the night as a means of begetting a son. Éogan is then killed the day after Fíachu's conception (pars. 39-41). Due allowance being made for different *dramatis personae*, a virtually identical set of circumstances characterises Art's last night before dying in battle, the host and mate this time being the smith Olc Acha of Connacht and his daughter Achtan (pars. 44-7). However, only Fíachu's actual birth is described (pars. 42-3; ch. 8, 5). *Scéla Eogain ⁊ Cormaic* begins with essentially the same parallel narrative, but after briefly narrating Fíachu's conception and birth (pars. 1-3) proceeds to give a much fuller account of Cormac's birth and fosterage as well as his conception (pars. 4-15; ch. 8, 6). In *Genemuin Chormaic*, on the other hand, this is recounted without any attempt to draw a parallel with Fíachu.

To comparative grounds for regarding the latter as the oldest extant version of Cormac's birth-tale (ch. 9, 7) can be added genealogical considerations elucidated by Ó Corráin, who points out that the "ties of *pietas*, loyalty and mutual support" resulting from it constituted "a model for the relationship which should exist between the descendants of ancestors bound by the tie of fosterage" (1986, 148). Cormac's fosterer Lugnae Fer Trí and finder Grec mac Arod in *Genemuin Chormaic* are ancestors of the Luigni, Corco Fer Tri and Grecraige, dwindling north Connacht septs that apparently "disappeared from the political map in the eighth century" and probably "were in decline long before" (ibid., 149). By that stage the Uí Néill and their allies would have had little reason to continue to emphasise such an undistinguished and politically unprofitable liaison, and in the later *Scéla Eogain ⁊ Cormaic* "we find that some interesting changes have been made. Now the connection of Lugna and with Connacht is far more tenuous and that section of the text dealing with that aspect of Cormac's birth is dramatically foreshortened. Lugna becomes a hunter who merely happens on the boy as he ran with the wolves. He fostered him for a year until his mother came to hear about it and took her son away. She brought him to the north, to Fíachnae Cassán who welcomed him and fostered him, and it is from the north that Cormac set out for Tara" (ibid., 151).

The political significance of this shift resides in the fact that "Fíachnae Cassán is none other than Fíachrae Cassán, ancestor of Ind Airthir, the group of Airgíalla dynastic families who controlled Armagh and the kingdom in which it lay" (ibid.). The political instability that made the Armagh abbacy so contentious in the late eighth and early ninth centuries (cf. McCone, 1984, 316-9) may well have suggested that "the Uí Néill needed to be reminded of their special relationship with the Airgíalla and with Armagh" with the result that "Armagh rose to the occasion ans produced two superb pieces of political propaganda: the tale of the three Collas and the text under discussion" (Ó Corráin, ibid.). The latter implies that "because their ancestor fostered Cormac and his father Art, Airgíalla and especially Ind Airthir are

entitled to a 'favoured nation' status and to the special care and consideration of the Uí Néill. He it was, too, who first put the royal purple about the youth, a symbolic way of saying that Ind Airthir and Armagh were the first to recognise the *imperium* of the Uí Néill" (ibid., 152).

This, of course, is a fine example of the clerical manipulation of ostensibly secular 'tradition' for political ends. Furthermore, the establishment of narrative as well as chronological correlations between figures like Éogan and Art, Fíachu and Cormac shows how intimately saga can interact with plain genealogy and *vice versa*. Since such narrative diptychs were presumably generated to match and emphasise key structures in the broad genealogical and chronological record elaborated in the monasteries, they too must be regarded as the primarily literary products of the cloister. As usual, one can only admire the skill and sensitivity with which the various strands were interwoven with each other and the whole in the vast web of socially, politically and religiously oriented *senchus* that early Christian Ireland's *literati* so painstakingly and creatively compiled and cultivated to explain their and their fellow countrymen's role in the world.

Epilogue

The foregoing chapters have explored the decisive contribution of clerical attitudes and other contemporary factors to an early Christian Irish literature that might be described as for the monastery, of the monastery, by the monastery. These concerns were often secular rather than ecclesiastical, material rather than spiritual, local rather than national, but that merely reflects the Church's central role in the body politic from at least the early seventh century onwards.

Notwithstanding the wide range of issues great and small with which they deal, most medieval Irish texts seem to be explicitly or implicitly anchored in an ideological and historical continuum stretching back from the present, via the various invasions and migrations supposed to have affected Ireland and her rulers' ancestors, to the flood and thence to the creation of the world. This scheme daringly represented Patrick's fifth-century mission to Ireland as a small-scale reenactment of Christ's appearance in the world to bring the Old Testament law and prophets, including history, to fulfilment in the New. Historical typology could then accommodate the pagan past to the Christian present by viewing it as an Irish 'Old Testament' perfected rather than abrogated by the national apostle's Christian dispensation. In this way all Irish legal, genealogical and mytho-historical *senchus*, whether set in the pre- or post-Patrician era, could embody a broadly identical set of contemporary values and customs represented as essentially immutable but in fact adjusted and readjusted to the Church's ongoing interaction with current social and political realities.

Allegory and typology allowed 'homeostatic' traditional modes of mythical thought to operate beneath a veneer of historical dynamism and progressive revelation, thus enabling early Christian Irish secular and religious preoccupations to be projected back into a pre-Christian past conceived primarily as a model of and for the present. Keenly asserted ecclesiastical control over its revelation facilitated the endowment of convenient innovations with the prestige of antiquity by slipping them into a pre-Patrician *senchus* consciously cast in an Old Testament mould, and serviceable pagan elements were doubtless also absorbed into the new hybrid construct with varying degrees of modification.

So thoroughgoing was the operation of this ideological mixer that the modern scholar is hard put to separate pagan and Christian ingredients out of the resultant

blend. Attention to the two-way assimilatory process involved, and the purpose behind it, not only seems more profitable than an obsession with often unverifiable origins, but also provides an antidote to naive nativist tendencies to take clerical representations of the pre-Christian Irish past at face value. Indeed, an appreciation of the way in which early Irish *senchus* was forged is an absolute prerequisite for any useful attempt to identify some of the myriad old, borrowed and new elements that went into its make-up. With all due reservations about its far less efficient applicability to culture and semantics than to linguistic forms, judicious and maximally exhaustive use of the comparative method remains the best means of establishing the presumption of a given feature's prehistoric provenance.

However, conclusions arrived at via this route must be balanced against the availability of plausible sources for direct borrowing. At all events, research of this type needs to be carried out with more sophistication and less wishful thinking than have commonly been brought to bear upon it hitherto. Even so, the results will often be far from certain, and should not be allowed to detract from study of the actually attested construct in its own terms.

Far from being mere clumsy and unimaginative redactors of oral traditions, early Christian Ireland's monastic moulders and transmitters of *senchus* combined literary creativity with intellectual rigour to such an extent in their pursuit of a coherent 'native Christian' mytho-history of their island and race that they have had little difficulty in duping many a modern scholar inclined to patronise their efforts. Instead of cocking a snook, we should take our hats off to them.

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Index

Acallam na Senórach: 199, 200, 205-6, 208.
adaltrach "additional wife": 85.
Adomnán: 9, 179-81, 242.
Additamenta: 35, 245, 250.
adṛṣṭakāma "love unseen": 110-1.
Áed Allán: 10, 222.
Áed mac Bricc: 87, 165-6, 174, 190, 194.
Áed of Sletty: 91, 245.
Áed Sláine: 236, 239-40, 242, 248, 251-2.
áer, see satire.
áes dáno "men of art": 8, 25, 28, 33, 66, 86-7, 90, 96, 98, 122, 125-8, 161, 163-5, 170-1, 223, 226-7.
AFM, see Annals of the Four Masters.
AI, see Annals of Inisfallen.
Aided Cheltchair maic Uthechair: 63-4.
Aided Chonchobuir: 43, 74-5, 121, 123, 198.
Aided Con na Cerda: 63.
Aided Crimthainn maic Fidaig: 121.
Aided Díarmata meic Fergusa Cerrbeóil: 145-6, 251.
Aided Fergusa maic Léti: 123, 180.
Aided Meidbe: 119, 131.
Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca: 132-4, 145-8.
Ailbe of Emly: 73, 191, 193-5, 241, 243, 245.
Ailerán: 180, 183.
Ailill (mac Echach): 239, 249.
Ailill (mac Mágach): 78, 151.
Ailill Ólomm: 47, 110, 123, 238-9, 244, 253-4.
ainmne "patience": 63, 142.
Aipgitir Chrábaid: 219.
airchetal "poetry": 24, 166-8, 224.
airchinnech "head of monastery": 22.
aire déso "noble of clientship": 189, 211.
aire échta "noble of slaughter": 211-2, 223.
airecht "council": 99, 126.
Airgíalla: 189, 238-41, 245-9, 254.
Airne Fíngein: 75-6, 80.
Airthir: 247, 254-5.
Aitchison, N.B.: 4.
aithech "freeman, churl": 123, 129, 208, 220, 237.
aithech-thúatha "vassal peoples": 69, 237.
allegory: 56-7, 79, 81-3, 138, 157-8, 169, 199, 230, 237, 256.
allud "renown": 127-8.
almsana "alms": 142-3.
Alter, R.: 6, 29, 41, 45, 48.
Altram Tige dá Medar: 149-50, 152, 174, 183.
Amairgen: 69, 97, 101-2.
ambue "stranger, outlaw": 162-3.
Annals of Inisfallen: 72, 241.
Annals of the Four Masters: 23-4.
Annals of Tigernach: 9, 24, 72.
Annals of Ulster: 9, 10, 23-4, 72, 87, 219, 241, 247.
Aristotle: 109-11.
Armagh: 7, 9-10, 87-8, 91, 140, 152, 177, 197, 241-7, 250, 253-5.
Arnold, M.: 21.
Art mac Cuinn: 111, 133-4, 153, 157, 159, 191, 214, 239, 253-5.
Asdiwal: 62, 187-8, 192.
asvamedha "horse sacrifice": 110, 118-9.
AT, see Annals of Tigernach.
Atalanta: 111.
AU, see Annals of Ulster.
Audacht Morainn: 31, 121, 126, 129, 140-1, 143.
Augustine: 92, 156.
Auraicept na nÉces: 27, 36, 67.
Aycock, D.A.: 187-8

Badb: 132.
Báetán: 242-3.
Baetke, W.: 19.
Baile Chuind: 109.
Baile in Scáil: 109, 156.
Ballymote, Book of: 35.
Bangor: 11, 22.
bard "bard(ic poet)": 27, 165, 167, 224-8.
barr Briúin "Brión's crown": 152.
Barthes, R.: 60.
Baumgarten, R.: 46, 56.
Becc mac Dé: 145-6, 251-2.
Bechbretha: 123.
Bécuma: 133-4, 152-3.
Bede: 10-1, 71, 180.
bélrae bán "white language, Latin": 25-6, 92, 96, 99.
bélrae féne "legal language", see *féne(chus)*.
Benignus/Benén: 97, 177, 200.
Berach: 198, 229-30.
Bergin, O.: 43.
Berrad Airechta: 212.
berserk: 213, 218.
Bethu Brigte: 35, 87, 140, 162, 164-5, 195.
Bethu Phátraic: 87, 90, 195, 229, 245.
Bhreathnach, M.: 132, 146.
Bibelwerk: 72, 93-4.
Binchy, D.A.: 2, 8-10, 12, 14, 43, 85, 93, 100, 140, 179, 195, 204, 211.
blister/bubble: 124, 168-9, 173.
bóaire "cow freeman": 124, 162-3, 189, 204-5, 208, 221.
Boethius: 37.
bolg, see blister/bubble.
Book of Armagh: 35, 89.
Book of Leinster: 1, 12, 24, 69, 74, 109, 125, 127, 148-9, 201, 206, 223, 244.
Book of the Angel, see *Liber Angeli*.
Book of Rights, see *Lebor na Cert*.
Bórama: 224.
brandub "tablut": 208-9.
Breatnach, L.: 18, 23, 25-6, 35, 40, 42-4, 88, 91, 102, 166-7, 174, 224, 228.
Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemne: 197.
Bremmer, J.: 203.
Bres mac Elathon: 105, 123, 125, 130, 139, 152, 158, 221.
breth "judgement" (e.g. *b. rechta (Maísi), ecalsa, flatha, filed, fáithe)*: 24, 26, 73, 86, 96, 99, 101-2, 123-4, 127-8, 142, 144.
Bretha Crólige: 85, 203, 211-2, 221, 223, 225.
Bretha Nemed: 23, 27, 41, 43, 88, 172, 174, 225, 228.
Brían Bóruma: 183, 242-3.
Bríg: 162-3.
Brigit: 9, 76, 87, 140, 162-6, 174-6, 180-3, 186-7, 189-90, 193-4, 219, 243, 245-6, 251.
Brión (mac Echach): 239, 249.
brithem(nas) "judge(ment)": 19, 22-6, 33, 36, 69, 84-7, 90, 96-7, 102, 122, 126, 135, 138, 140, 223, 227, 230, 232.
briugu "hospitaller": 22, 32, 48, 124-5, 127-8, 162-4, 170-1, 209, 219.
Broccán: 36.
Brug na Bóinne: 149-50, 152.
bruiden "hostel": 32.
Bruiden Da Choca: 32, 132, 136.
Buchet: 48, 54-5, 124, 128, 131, 253.
Bürgschaft, see *Berrad Airechta*.
Buttimer, C.G.: 77.
Byrne, F.J.: 65, 69, 107, 146, 236, 238, 242-3.

Caesar: 84.
Caí Caínbrethach: 31, 101-2, 106, 231.
Caillech Bérri "Old Woman of Beare": 154.
Cáin Adomnáin: 9.
Cáin Fuithirbe: 26, 91-2, 100, 220.
Cáin Phátraic: 9.
cáinte "satirist": 158, 220-3. 225-8.
Cairbre Cinn Chait: 73, 123, 129.
Cairbre *fili*: 105, 130, 220.
Cairbre Lifechair: 120, 122, 131, 141, 209, 239-40, 248.
Cairbre mac Néill: 239-40, 250-1.
Cairbre Nia Fer: 72, 206.
Cairbre of Coleraine: 195, 245.
Cairnech of Dulane: 97, 147.
Caithréim Cellaig: 157.
"Caldron of Poesy": 166-7, 170-1, 201.
Cambrai Homily: 35.
Can a mBunadus na nGáedel: 24, 68.
Can. Hib., see Irish Canons.
Carey, J.: 70
Carney, J.: 2, 7, 18, 39, 41, 43-4, 52-3, 74, 80, 118, 180, 201, 215.
Cásc na ngente "the pagans' Easter": 101.
Cashel: 9, 25, 69, 131, 238, 242-3, 252-3.
Cath Almaine: 125, 163.
Cath Bóinde: 119, 131, 192.
Cath Maige Mucrama: 47, 63, 122-3, 130, 190-1, 221, 248, 253.
Cath Maige Tuired: 55, 70-2, 123, 125, 130, 139, 151, 158, 162-3, 165-6, 189, 225.
Cathéer Már: 54, 120, 124, 139, 159, 236, 239, 244, 253.
cathair attaig, see *civitas refugii*.
Cathal mac Finguine: 242.
Cathbad *druí*: 136, 223.
cathmíl, see *láech*.
Celtic twilight: 21.
cenél "lineage": 9, 16, 121-2, 127-8, 212.
Cenél Cairbri: 240, 250-1.
Cenél Conaill: 10, 118, 236, 238-40, 242.

Cenél nÉogain: 10, 22, 236, 238-40.
Cenn Fáelad: 5, 23-4, 41, 75, 99.
cerd "metalwork(er)": 86-7, 163-5, 170.
Cet mac Mágach: 52, 74, 78.
cétach Lóegairi "Lóegaire's mantle": 152.
Cethirslicht Athgabála: 101, 162, 166, 211-2.
Chadwick, N.K.: 77, 228.
Cían(n)acht(a): 242, 253.
Ciarán of Clonmacnoise: 145-6.
Ciarán of Saigir: 87.
Cín Dromma Snechta: 1, 49.
civitas refugii (cathair attaig) "city of refuge": 88-9, 102, 145.
Clann Cholmáin: 10, 236, 238-40, 251-2.
Clanricarde, Marquis of: 27-8.
Clogher: 189, 245-6.
Clonard: 10.
Clones: 189, 245-6.
Clonmacnoise: 7, 9, 145.
Clover, C.J.: 52.
Cnucha Cnoc os cionn Life: 109.
Cobthach Cóel Breg: 239-41.
Codex Sancti Pauli: 207, 213.
Cogitosus: 9, 87-8, 91, 162, 180-1, 244, 246.
co(i)mgne "history": 25-7, 75-6.
Cóir Anmann: 36, 109-10, 112, 118-9, 149, 173, 190, 192, 213, 220.
coire "cauldron" (e.g. *c. goiriath, érmae, sois*): 48, 124, 163, 167, 170, 174, 177, 230.
Colla(s), see Three Collas.
Collectio Canonum Hibernensis, see Irish Canons.
Colmán mac Lénéni: 36.
Colmán of Lann Elo: 197.
Columba/Colum Cille: 11, 146, 179-81, 242, 248.
Columbanus: 11.
Comainmnigiud Náem nÉrenn: 150.
Comanmanna Náeb-úag nÉrenn: 162.
Compert Con Culainn: 40, 46, 50, 52, 198, 231.
Comthóth Lóegairi: 98.
comúaim n-ecalsa fri túaith "union of Church and State": 25, 83, 145, 158, 244.
Conaille Muirthemne (Louth): 206, 248.
Conaire (Már): 39, 44, 60-1, 112, 120-3, 129-32, 137, 139, 192-5, 204.
Conall Cernach: 52, 60, 74, 78, 171, 239-40.
Conall Corc: 92, 97, 131, 182, 239, 252-3.
Conall Costamail: 192, 206, 239, 248.
Conall Cremthainne: 236, 239, 250-1.
Conchobur mac Nessa: 64, 73-4, 78, 97, 121, 129, 132, 172, 197-8, 200, 203, 206, 231.
Conláed of Kildare: 87, 165.
Conn Cétchathach: 73, 75, 79-80, 109, 112, 126, 133-4, 152-3, 156-7, 159, 193, 238-9, 241, 244, 253.
Connacht(men): 9, 32, 60, 64, 69, 77-8, 121, 123, 132, 135, 146, 152, 171, 183, 201, 205, 213-4, 219, 238-41, 248-9, 253-4.
Corco Loígde: 252-3.
Corish, P.J.: 10.
Cork: 24, 252.
Cormac Conn Loinges: 132, 157.
Cormac mac Airt: 31, 54-5, 73-5, 80, 94, 101, 109, 120-2, 126, 129, 131, 135-6, 141-2, 155-7, 159, 182, 191, 193-4, 198, 209, 214-7, 230, 239, 242, 248, 253-5.
"Cormac's Dream": 135.
Cormac's Glossary, see *Sanas Chormaic*.
Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae: 233-4, 236.
Corthals, J.: 74.
Córus Béscnai: 25, 92, 96-7, 100, 102-3, 125, 143, 221, 226.
Creidne: 192-3, 206-7, 248.
cretem ad:annai "faith that kindles": 122, 175.
Críth Gablach: 9, 87, 122, 124-6, 162-3, 189, 202-3, 205, 208, 211-12, 220, 232.
Cross, T.P.: 184.
Crúachu: 7, 32, 135, 151, 238.
cruitt "harper": 87.
Cú cen Máthair: 30, 39, 66.
Cú Chulainn: 49, 63, 78, 121, 149, 171-3, 176, 179, 182, 197-204, 209.
Cu(i)lmen(n): 12, 201.
cuire "band": 15, 209, 214.
cumal "unit of value, female slave": 23.
cumal senorbai "senior heir's extra portion": 103, 208.
Cummaíne Fota: 22, 209.
Cyrus of Persia: 181.

Dagger, C.: 150.
Daig of Inishkeen: 87, 161, 164-6, 174-6.
Dál Fíatach: 239-40.
Dál nAraide: 239-40, 242, 244-5.
Dál Ríata: 240.
Damayantī: 110-13, 118.
dán "art, profession": 22, 87, 166-7, 169, 206, 209, 224.
De Duodecim Abusivis Saeculi: 139.
De Síl Chonairi Móir: 60-1, 111-2, 116, 120, 123, 192, 195.
de Vries, J.: 110, 164, 182, 184, 216.
dechmada (ɔ primiti) "tithes (and firstfruits)": 102, 143.
delb "shape": 121-2, 127-8.
Delbcháem: 133-4.
Désí Breg: 159-60, 240.
Díarmait mac Cerbaill: 75, 145-7, 239, 242, 251.
díbad "extinction (of patrimony)": 103, 123.

díberg(ach) "reaver": 129, 137, 206-7, 209, 211, 213, 220-1, 226.
díchetal di chennaib: 168-9, 231.
Dillon, M.: 2, 13, 20, 37, 58, 103, 136.
Din Techtugud: 143.
dindsenchus: 165.
Do Bunad Imthechta Éoganachta: 242, 248.
Do Fastud Cirt ⁊ Dligid: 92.
Do Suidigud Tellaich Temra: 75, 93, 156, 199, 202.
Donaghpatrick: 250-1.
Donn Désa and sons: 44, 206, 213.
Donnchad (Midi): 10.
Douglas, M.: 131.
Downpatrick: 247.
drisiuc, see *cáinte*.
druí(decht) "druid(ry)": 7, 19-21, 33-4, 74, 80-1, 84-6, 92, 133, 135-6, 138-9, 146, 150-3, 157, 165, 168, 173-4, 176-7, 183, 186, 190, 195-6, 220-3, 226-32, 242, 248-9.
Dubthach maccu Lugair: 25, 44, 90-2, 96-8, 101, 165, 201, 227.
Duby, G.: 210-1.
dúilem "creator": 140-1.
dul, see *cáinte*.
Dumézil, G.: 3, 58, 63, 117-19, 125.
Dumville, D.: 79.
dúnad "conclusion of poem": 41.
Dúnlang and sons: 250, 253.
Durrow: 9, 11.

Éber (son of Míl): 68-70, 239-41.
Eber Scott: 68.
Eberle, P.J.: 143.
écclann "warrior": 205, 212.
éces (éicse) "poet(ry)": 87, 224.
echtra(e) "outing, adventure": 79, 81, 249.
Echtra Airt meic Cuinn: 109, 111-12, 133-4, 152-3, 208.
Echtrae Chonlai: 7, 79-82, 152, 157-8, 201.
Echtra Cormaic i Tír Tairngiri: 156, 169.
Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin: 109, 112, 132, 134, 173, 182-4, 188, 249.
Echtra Nerai: 151.
Echtra Thaidg mheic Céin: 80.
eclais "Church, cleric": 1, 16, 20, 25-6, 41, 55, 81, 85-7, 89, 98, 143, 145, 147-8, 158, 230, 244.
ecnae "(ecclesiastical) scholar": 22, 24-6, 88, 149.
Eithne (d. of Eochaid Feidlech): 190.
Eithne (d. of Lóegaire): 151.
Eithne (Thaebfota): 54-5, 109, 112, 120, 128, 131, 133-6, 148, 150-1, 156-7, 174, 183, 253.
Elcmar: 149-50.
Eliade, M.: 58.
Emain Machae: 7, 10, 32, 97, 197.
Emly: 24, 241, 244-5, 250.
enech "face, honour": 124, 127-8, 172, 225.
enech Dúnlainge "tunic of Dúnlang": 152.
Énna Cennsalach: 245, 250, 253.
Eochaid Feidlech: 48, 51, 110, 113, 119, 126, 241.
Eochaid Úa Flannacáin: 24-5.
Eochu Muigmedón: 239-41, 248-9.
Éogan (Már): 36, 110, 123, 190-1, 238-9, 241, 253-5.
Éogan of Ardstraw: 194, 245.
Éoganacht (e.g. E. Chaisil, Raithlind, Locha Léin): 36, 39, 69, 131-2, 189, 239-41, 250-3.
epscop "bishop": 16, 22-3, 99, 126, 138, 140, 230, 232.
éraic "wergild": 96.
Erc mac Dego (of Slane): 25, 90-1, 97, 227.
Éremón: 69-71, 239-41, 243.
érgnae "understanding": 122, 127-8.
Esnada Tige Buchet: 7, 48, 54-5, 109, 120, 124, 131, 135, 139, 159, 170, 236, 253.
Étaín: 34, 44, 51, 110, 112-3.
Eterscél: 61, 112, 120, 128, 131, 192-3.
Etymologiae, see Isidore of Seville.
etymology: 1, 46-7, 56-7.
Evans-Pritchard, E.E.: 58.
euhemerism: 111, 114, 148-9, 234.
Expositio in Canticum Canticorum: 81.

fáel(ad) "wolf(ing)": 213.
Fáelán mac Colmáin: 157.
faithche "green, in-field": 189, 191.
fáith(sine) "prophet (prophecy)": 75, 92, 141, 145, 165, 186, 190-1, 228, 230, 251.
feb "wealth, fortune": 127-8.
Fedelm (d. of Lóegaire): 151.
Feidlimid mac Crimthainn: 9, 242.
Feidlimid Rechtaid: 239-40.
féindid, see *fían*.
feis (Temro) "feast (of Tara)": 101, 118, 173-4, 221.
Félire Óengusso: 7, 21, 36, 87, 165, 176, 200, 226, 251.
féne(chus) "Irish (law)": 23-7, 36, 42-3, 67, 86, 99-100, 102, 105, 124, 126, 204, 221.
Fénius Farsaid: 31, 36, 67-8, 101.
fer cerda "poet": 25, 225.
fer co(i)mgne, see *co(i)mgne*.
fer dána, see *bard*.
fer léigind, see *suí (litre)*.
Fer Loga: 60-1, 64, 78.
fer midboth: 203-5.
ferb, see blister/bubble.
Fergal mac Máele Dúin: 10, 222.
fergniae "champion": 212, 223.

Fergus mac Roig: 46, 201-2, 240.
Fíacc of Sletty: 25, 90-1, 245, 250.
Fíachrae Cassán: 191, 254.
Fíachrae (mac Echach): 121, 239, 241, 249.
Fíachu Fer Mara: 192-3, 239, 241.
Fíachu Muillethan: 189-91, 193-4, 239, 242, 253-5.
Fíachu Sraiptine: 239, 248.
fíadnaise "(eyewitness) evidence": 202.
fíad-rath "wild fief": 211.
fían "Männerbund, warrior society": 15, 39, 44, 61, 125, 163, 172-4, 194, 203, 205-7, 209-14, 218-20, 222-3, 225-7, 229.
fíannaigecht: 200, 205.
fidchell "wood-sense" (boardgame): 133, 152, 208-9.
filedacht "poetry": 23-4, 26, 96, 99, 167.
fili "poet": 19-28, 35-6, 68-9, 75, 85-6, 88-90, 92, 96-100, 102, 105, 126-7, 135, 138, 140, 142, 158, 162-5, 167-8, 170, 179, 201, 223-8, 230, 232.
Findemna (Bres, Nár, Lothar): 119, 126.
fine "kindred": 9, 103, 141, 205, 236.
fingal "kin-slaying": 141, 248-9, 252.
Fingal Rónáin: 133-4.
Finn mac Cumaill: 169, 179, 182, 188.
Finnegan, R.: 4.
Finnian of Moville: 202.
Fintan mac Bóchra: 75-6, 93, 199, 202.
fír (flatha/flaithemon) "(ruler's) truth": 108, 124, 127-9, 132, 139, 141-2, 153, 156, 172, 231.
Fir Bolg: 69-72, 150, 237.
'First' Life of Brigit, see *Vita I S. Brigidae*.
flaith(ius) "rule(r)": 86, 109, 121, 124-5, 127-30, 134-5, 142-5, 150, 156, 174, 206, 211, 230, 241, 248.
Flann Mainistrech: 24-5, 140.
fled "feast" (e.g. *f. déodae, dóendae, demundae*): 125, 221.
Fled Bricrenn: 50.
folud "substance, duty, entitlement": 122, 124, 127-8.
Fomorians: 40, 70-2, 158-9.
Ford, P.K.: 176-7.
fordécsam "bishop": 16.
fortúatha "dependent kingdoms": 237-8, 244.
fosterage: 194, 203, 254.
Fox, R.: 193.
Fragmentary Annals of Ireland: 222.
Frankfort, H.: 110.
Frazer, J.G.: 57.
Frye, N.: 6.
Fursae: 11.

gabála Érenn "the takings of Ireland", see *Lebor Gabála Érenn*.
gaís "wisdom": 121-2, 127-8, 140.
gaisced "set of weapons, prowess": 46, 121-2, 127-8.
Gaius: 94.
gal "valour": 46, 124, 127-8.
Gantz, J.: 77.
gart "generosity": 121-2, 124, 127-8.
gáu (flatha) "(ruler's) lie": 108, 121, 142, 144, 156, 231.
geinti "pagans": 21, 100-1, 149, 176-7, 219, 222, 226.
geis "taboo": 8, 132, 136-7.
Genemuin Chormaic: 65, 73, 122, 159, 191, 214, 254.
Gerriets, M.: 126.
Giraldus Cambrensis: 117, 119, 164, 173.
Glasdám *cáinte*: 223.
Glendalough: 7.
gobae (goibnecht) "(black)smith(craft)": 86-7, 162-3, 165, 191.
Góedel (Glas): 24, 67-8.
goire "filial warmth": 103.
Goldener Vogel "Golden Bird": 112, 116, 249.
Goody, J.: 4, 104, 223, 227, 235-6.
Gormlaith: 148.
grád écmaise "love in absence": 110-1, 133.
grád/fer túaithe "grades/man of the kingdom/lay society": 124-5, 127-8, 163-4, 170.
Gray, E.: 158.
Grec mac Arod (Grecraige): 214, 254.
Greene, D.: 136.
Gregory the Great: 11, 19, 56, 81, 180.
Gúbretha Caratniad: 126, 208.

Herbert, M.: 11.
Herodotus: 216.
hieros gamos "sacred marriage": 110, 138, 153.
Hillgarth, J.N.: 12.
Hirt, H.: 15.
hospitaller, see *briugu*.
Howlett, D.: 32.

Imacallam in dá Thúarad "Colloquy of the two Sages": 97, 165, 228.
imbus (for:osna) "great knowledge (that illuminates)": 129, 168-9, 228.
immram "voyage": 79, 81.
Immram Brain: 7, 50, 52, 79-80, 82, 152, 157, 201.
Immram Curraig Ua Corra: 219.
inheritance by daughter(s): 103, 205.
Inishboffin: 11.
Iona: 11.
Ír (son of Míl) 239-41.

Irish Canons: 29, 85, 89, 92, 99-100, 102-3, 139, 146, 148, 154, 230.
Isidore of Seville: 12, 36-8, 46-7, 56, 66-7, 71-2, 81-2, 93-5, 102, 149-50, 157-8, 201, 230.
iudex, see *brithem*.
ius naturae/naturale, see *recht aicnid*.
iuvenes "(martial) youths": 210, 214-5, 229.

Jackson, K.H.: 2-3.
Jerome: 29, 47, 49.
Jones, Sir William: 2.

Kelleher, J.V.: 197.
Kells: 159, 250, 253.
Kelly, F.: 99, 124, 126, 136, 140, 193.
Kerényi: 58.
Kildare: 7, 10, 26, 87-8, 91, 152, 157, 164-5, 189, 243-6, 250.
king(dom), see *rí, túath*.
Kirk, G.S.: 58, 114.
Knott, E.: 208.

láech "warrior": 121-2, 125, 127-8, 163-4.
Laigin, see Leinster(men).
Laisrén: 157.
Lampe, G.W.H.: 32, 56.
Lang, A.: 57.
Lasair: 165-6, 174.
Laud 610: 35, 242, 248.
Leach, E.: 185-6.
Lebor Buide Sláne: 1.
Lebor Gabála Érenn: 27, 55, 66-8, 241-2.
Lebor na Cert: 237.
Lebor na hUidre: 1, 73, 149, 200-2, 205.
léigend "(ecclesiastical) learning": 16, 22-4, 26, 86, 92, 99.
Leinster(men): 10, 48, 66, 77, 90-1, 131, 134-5, 152, 159, 164, 182, 189, 236, 238-46, 253.
Leth Cuinn "Conn's Half": 69-70, 238, 240-2, 253-4.
Leth Moga "Mug's Half": 69-70, 238, 240-2, 253-4.
Lévi-Strauss, C.: 61-3, 104, 127, 130, 170, 174, 185, 187.
liaig (leiges) "leach(craft)": 86-7, 162-5, 170.
Liber Angeli: 88, 242-3.
liminal(ity): 185-90, 192-4, 198-9.
Lindisfarne: 11.
Livy: 108, 215.
Lóegaire mac Néill: 33-4, 71-2, 90-2, 96-7, 150-1, 177, 200-1, 229-30, 233, 239-42, 246, 250-1.
lommrad "denuding": 63.
Lord, A.: 3.
Louth: 22.
LL, see Book of Leinster.
LU, see *Lebor na hUidre*.
lúan láith "warrior's moon": 171, 176.
Lug: 71, 158-9, 198, 234.
Lugaid (Laígde etc.): 109, 112, 118, 128, 173.
Lugaid Mac Con, see Mac Con.
Lugaid Réo-/Ríab-derg: 69, 119, 123, 126, 131, 156, 192-3.
Lugna (Luigne) Fer Trí: 191, 194, 214, 254.

Mabinogi: 54, 112.
Mac Cana, P.: 2, 5-7, 10, 12-4, 17-8, 20-1, 23, 27-8, 44, 50, 55, 80, 128, 131, 138, 142, 223, 230.
Mac Con: 47, 123, 130, 191, 206, 214-5, 253-4.
MacDonell, A.A.: 11.
Mac Cáirthinn of Clogher: 245-6.
Mac Eoin, G.: 12.
Macgnímartha Find: 169.
Mac Mathúna, S.: 79.
Mac Neill, E.: 23, 54, 211, 228.
Mac Niocaill, G.: 235.
Mac White, E.: 208-9.
Máel Fothartaig: 134-5.
Máel Mura (Othna): 23-4, 27, 68.
Máelsechlainn mac Domnaill: 183.
magus, see *druí*.
maicc báis "sons of death": 219, 221.
Malinowski, B.: 58.
Manannán mac Lir: 149-50, 156-7, 169.
Martianus Capella: 37.
McCone, K.R.: 3, 48, 65, 209, 211, 224-5, 227, 244-5, 249.
McLeod, N.: 142-3, 204.
McManus, D.: 16.
McNamara, M.: 81, 95.
Medb: 78, 109, 119, 148, 151, 159.
Melia, D.F.: 60.
mes "judgement": 122, 127-8.
Mes Búachalla: 61, 112, 120, 123, 128, 192-4.
Mesca Ulad: 50, 52, 69, 129.
Míadslechta: 23, 25-6, 34, 124, 177, 225.
Midir: 34, 112.
Míl and sons: 30-1, 67, 69-70, 75, 102, 106, 133, 149, 237, 239-40, 243.
Milesian, see Míl and sons.
Mis: 128, 173.
Mittelirische Verslehren: 35, 224-5.
Mochtae of Louth: 161, 164, 176.
Moling: 207, 213.
Moluae: 209.
Mongán mac Fíachna: 17-8.
Morann: 73-4, 101, 142.
mrugfer, see *bóaire*.

M'Tonga, M.: 220.
Mug Núadat, see Éogan (Már).
Muirchertach mac Erca: 146-8.
Muirchú: 25, 33-4, 44, 68, 72, 79, 89-91, 97, 176, 180, 195-6, 206, 227, 229, 242, 245-7, 250-1.
Muiredach Tírech: 239, 248-9.
Müller, M.: 57.
Munster(men): 9-10, 39, 66, 131, 183, 189-90, 238, 240-4, 250, 252-3.
Murdoch, G.P.: 210.
Murphy, G.: 4, 6, 27, 39-41, 50, 57, 109, 140, 228.

Nad Fróech and sons: 131, 239, 250, 252-3.
Nagy, J.F.: 4, 169-70, 173, 186, 199-202, 205.
Nala: 49, 110-2, 118.
nativist: 2, 8, 13, 17-9, 24, 27, 35, 43, 53, 79, 106, 121, 227, 230, 257.
Nél: 68.
nemed (nemthes) "inviolate person (status)": 86, 98, 142, 221.
Nennius: 17-8, 67-8, 70.
nert "strength": 127-8.
Ní Dhonnchadha, M.: 9.
Níall Noígíallach: 109, 128, 132, 182-3, 189, 191, 193-4, 196, 235-6, 239-42, 244, 248-51, 253.
nóeb "holy, saint": 16, 149, 244.
nofis "legal knowledge": 97.
núachrotha "new metres": 28, 224.
Núadu (Argatlám): 166, 234, 240.
Núadu Déclám: 239, 241.
Núadu Find Fáil: 239-41.
núalitridi "recent authors": 28, 224.
Nutt, A.: 181.

Ó Briain, F.: 179.
Ó Cathasaigh, T.: 25, 58-9, 63, 109, 122, 154, 158-9, 182, 184-6, 203, 216.
Ó Coileáin, S.: 2, 5-6, 12.
Ó Corráin, D.: 5, 7-8, 18, 28, 31, 35, 44, 65, 77, 85, 88-90, 102, 104-5, 131, 233-4, 240, 243-4, 248, 252, 254.
O Hehir, B.: 134, 247, 153.
Ó hUiginn, R.: 235.
O'Leary, P.: 136.
Ó Máille, T.: 109.
O'Rahilly, T.F.: 7, 54, 57, 70, 148, 168.
Ó Riain, P.: 24, 186.
oblaire, see *cáinte*.
Odysseus: 113-6.
óenach "assembly": 5, 122, 250.
óenchiniud "sole kin": 204-5, 213.
Óengus mac Nad Froích: 239, 242-3.
Óengus (in Mac Óc): 149-50.
Oengus Tuirmech: 192, 239-40.
ollam "professor": 23, 26, 86-7, 99, 122.
Orosius: 67.
Oskamp, H.P.A.: 28.
Osraige: 239-41, 254.

Page, D.: 3.
paruchia "monastic federation": 11, 243, 246.
Patrick: 7, 13, 25, 32-4, 40, 68, 71-4, 76-7, 80, 86-7, 89-92, 95-101, 105, 126, 142, 150-1, 168, 176-7, 179-80, 188, 194-7, 199-202, 227-30, 232, 242-3, 245-7, 250, 256.
Penelope: 111, 113-6.
peritia, see *senchus*.
Picard, J.-M.: 179-81.
Plummer, C.: 48, 179-81, 198, 229.
poeta, see *fili*.
Polybius: 213.
Posidonius: 84.
prince's mirror, see *speculum principis*.
Prins, A.J.H.: 209.
Prometheus: 166, 171.
Propp, V.: 59-61, 185.
Psalter of Tara, see *Saltair Chormaic*.
Puhvel, J.: 118.
Pwyll Pendeuic Dyuet: 112.

Radcliffe-Brown: 58.
Radner, J.N.: 146-8.
Raglan, Lord: 182, 185.
Rank, O.: 182.
Rawlinson B. 502: 1, 30, 241, 248-9.
recht "law": 101-2, 156.
recht (fír) aicnid "law (truth) of nature": 92-7, 99-101, 105, 126, 156.
recht fáithe "law of the prophets": 92-5, 97, 100, 126.
recht litre "law of the letter": 92-3, 95-7, 99-100, 105, 126.
rechtgae "ordinance": 9, 122.
Rees, A. & B.: 3, 58-9, 75, 112, 136, 185.
Reference Bible, see *Bibelwerk*.
Renan, L.: 21.
Renna, T.: 143.
reto(i)ric/rhetoric: 42-6, 50-1, 74.
Rhiannon: 112-3.
rí "king": 8-9, 15, 22, 26, 33, 85, 99, 107, 118, 122-3, 126-8, 130, 144, 164, 174, 176, 214, 231-2, 242, 244.
ría/íar cretim "before/after faith": 71, 100, 149, 188, 242.
ríastrad "distortion" (of Cú Chulainn): 171.
Richter, M.: 13-4, 21, 23, 26-8.
rites of passage: 185.
Romulus: 117, 181, 215, 217.
rosc(ad): 24, 42-5, 86, 96, 99.

Ross Carberry: 24.
Russell, P.: 46.
Ruman mac Colmáin: 23-4.

sacerdotium "priesthood": 20, 231-2.
sáer "wright": 86, 163, 165.
Salamanca collection of Irish saints' Lives: 157, 161, 165, 189-91, 194, 197, 209, 243, 245.
Saltair Chormaic: 75, 101.
Samain: 147, 151-2.
Sanas Cormaic/Cormac's Glossary: 46, 67, 102, 123, 162, 168, 173, 228.
sapiens, see *suí (litre)*.
satire: 32, 89, 105, 124, 172, 177, 225.
satirist, see *cáinte*.
Saxo Grammaticus: 218.
Scál: 156-7.
Scél na Fír Flatha: 32, 74-6, 80, 101, 121, 129, 141, 149, 156-7, 169, 202, 230.
Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin: 41, 46, 51-2, 63.
Scéla Conchobair maic Nessa: 223.
Scéla Éogain ⁊ Cormaic: 65, 122, 163, 214, 248, 254.
Scéla Muicce Meic Da Thó: 32, 48, 50, 52, 60, 63, 72, 77-8, 122, 170-1, 191.
Schröder, F.R.: 117.
Schurtz, H.: 209.
Scowcroft, R.M.: 55, 66-7, 80, 241-2.
Ségdae Sáerlabraid: 153.
Senbríathra Fíthail: 142.
senchaid "historian": 22, 24, 36, 75-6, 90, 131, 199, 234.
Senchán Torpéist: 201.
Senchas na Relec: 73, 141.
senchus "lore": 24, 26-7, 65, 72, 75-7, 82, 99, 102, 105-6, 142, 148, 155, 160, 188, 199-200, 202, 233-4, 237, 244, 252, 255-7.
Senchus Már: 25, 34, 43-4, 93, 96-100, 102, 105, 126, 162, 202, 230.
Sentúatha Temra(ch): 147.
Serglige Con Culainn: 51, 65, 70, 123, 149, 168.
Serpell, R.: 220.
Sharpe, R.: 207, 220.
Síaburcharpat Con Culaind: 199-200.
síd "supernatural abode": 69-70, 110, 112, 147, 149, 151-2, 168, 192.
síd "peace": 121, 129, 142.
Síl Cuinn: 120, 131, 159, 240, 253.
Síl nÁedo Sláine: 236, 238-40, 250-2.
Sims-Williams, P.: 21.
Simms, K.: 27, 116.
sín Morainn "Morann's collar": 74.
Slane: 24, 90, 250-1.
Sletty: 245-6, 250.
slógad "hosting": 122, 205, 242.
Slotkin, E.M.: 4.
Sjoestedt, M.-L.: 122, 136.
Smalley, B.: 25.
Smith, R.M.: 142.
sóer-chlanna "free/noble lineages": 69, 123, 129, 237-8, 253.
soiscélae "Gospel": 16.
sovereign(ty), see *flaith(ius)*.
speculum principis: 143.
Sproule, D.: 39, 131.
St. Gall Codex: 28, 35, 163.
Stewart, F.H.: 209.
Stowe Missal: 35, 92-4, 163.
Strabo: 84, 165.
suí (litre) "chief scholar": 22-4, 26, 86-7, 92.
Suibne mac Colmáin: 251-2.
Sul(is): 164-5.
svayaṁvara "own choice": 110-1, 113.
sybils: 82, 106.

taboo, see *geis*.
Tacitus: 250.
taidbsiu "apparition": 149, 156.
Tailtiu: 250.
Táin Bó Cúailnge: 12, 35, 38, 49-51, 63, 65, 77, 121, 148-9, 152, 171-2, 197, 201-4, 231.
Táin Bó Flidais: 205.
Táin Bó Fraích: 51-2, 180, 207-8.
ta(i)rbfeis "bull-feast": 123, 168, 173.
taman, see *cáinte*.
Tara: 7, 10, 31, 33, 61, 69, 72, 75-6, 90-2, 97, 101, 109, 111-2, 116, 119-20, 122-3, 126, 128, 130-7, 139, 145-7, 151-2, 156-7, 159-60, 168, 177, 182-3, 191-2, 204, 215, 222-3, 229, 235-6, 238, 240-3, 246, 248-51, 253-4.
Tech Cletig: 147.
tech midchúarta "feasting hall": 124-5, 230.
tech n-oíged "guesthouse": 170.
Tecosca Cormaic: 31, 77, 121-2, 124-6, 136, 141, 143, 205, 209.
teinm laída: 168-9.
Thompson, S.: 184.
Three Collas: 239, 248-9, 254.
Thurneysen, R.: 18, 28, 42-3, 45, 49-50, 64-5, 77, 90, 140, 202, 205, 228.
Tigernach of Clonęs: 189, 193-5, 245-6.
Timna Chathaír Máir: 30.
Timna Néill: 31, 236.
Tírechán: 7, 72, 74, 87, 89, 91, 103, 151, 180, 188, 195-7, 208, 227, 245-6, 249, 250-1.
Tír Tairngiri "Land of promise": 133, 152, 156, 168.
tithes (and firstfruits), see *dechmada (⁊ primiti)*.
Tochmarc Emire: 209.

Tochmarc Étaíne: 34, 112, 192, 208.
Togail Bruidne Da Derga: 38-40, 42, 44, 46, 48, 51-2, 60-1, 110, 112-3, 121-3, 129-32, 136, 139, 168, 170, 192-5, 204, 206-7, 213.
Tract (*Ériu* 13) on poets: 27, 35, 44, 224-5.
trebad "property ownership/management": 124-5, 127-8, 170, 203-5.
Trefuilngid Treeochair: 75-6, 80, 156, 202.
trénfer: 87, 125.
Triads of Ireland: 24, 31.
Trim: 24, 233, 251.
Trindade, W.A.: 148.
Tripartite Life of Patrick, see *Bethu Phátraic*.
Tuán mac Cairill: 69, 75, 202.
túath "kingdom": 8-9, 26, 70, 87, 107, 130, 143-5, 162, 204-5, 207, 210-2, 214, 219, 223-6, 237, 241-2, 244.
túath Dé "God's people": 70-1, 158.
Túatha Dé Danann: 30, 69-70, 72, 133, 149-52, 158, 165, 174.
Túathal Máelgarb: 145.
Túathal Techtmar: 239, 241.
typology (historical): 56-7, 79, 83, 138, 158, 188, 199, 230-1, 256.

úasalaithre "patriarchs": 73.
Udacht Aithirne: 44.
Uí Ailella: 132, 238.
Uí Briúin: 132, 238.
Uí Cheinnselaig: 90, 238, 245, 250.
Uí Chremthainn: 10, 245-6.
Uí Dúnlainge: 238, 244, 246, 250.
Uí Fiachrach: 132, 238.
Uí Néill: 10, 69, 74, 91, 120, 130-2, 145-8, 152, 159, 182-3, 190, 235-6, 238-45, 248-51, 253-5.
Uisnech: 76, 130, 165.
Ulster(men)/*Ulaid*: 3-4, 10, 32, 60, 64, 72, 74, 77-8, 97, 118, 123, 129, 132, 135-6, 157, 197-8, 200, 205, 231, 238-42, 244, 247-9.
Ultán: 36, 180.
Uraicecht Becc: 22, 24, 26, 86-7, 99, 122, 124, 170, 225, 230.
Uraicecht na Ríar: 23, 88, 225.

van Gennep, A.: 185-6, 193, 209.
Vansina, J.: 4, 104, 218, 235.
Vendryes, J.: 13, 20.
Vernant, J.-P.: 55, 58, 62-3.
Vita I S. Brigidae: 48, 162-4, 174, 176, 180, 182-3, 186, 193, 219, 251.
Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae, see Salamanca or Plummer.
von Hahn, J.G.: 181-2, 184.

Walker, G.S.M.: 11.
Wasserschleben, H.: 102.
Watkins, C.: 40-1, 108.
Watson, A.: 127, 151-2.
Weiser, L.: 213.
Wikander, S.: 111.
Williams, N.J.A.: 27
"wolfskin" (*luch-thonn*, ONorse *ulfheðinn*): 213.

Wormald, P.: 9, 13.

Yimo: 119.

Zeuss, J.C.: 18.

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